DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 230 952	CS 207 614

AUTHOR	Tchudi, Stephen, Comp.; McNabb, Scott, Ed.
TITLE	Writing Teachers: What We Say about What We Do. Fifteen Essays for Teachers of Writing at the Secondary and College Levels.
INSTITUTION	Michigan Council of Teachers of English.
PUB DATE	83
NOTE	177p.; The Michigan Council of Teachers of English is an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Collected Works - General (020)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	College Faculty; Feedback; Higher Education; Language Usage; Learning Theories; Linguistic Theory; Minority Groups; *Revision (Written Composition); *Student Teacher Relationship; *Writing Evaluation; Writing Exercises; *Writing Instruction; *Writing Processes; *Writing Research

ABSTRACT

Prepared by college teachers of writing who are also teachers who write, the papers in this collection appear in a sequence that begins with theoretical issues and problems, moves through the stages of the writing process, and ends with a discussion of revision and evaluation. Specific topics covered in the papers include (1) language theory and the developmental curriculum, (2) enhancing writing through student choice of topics, (3) teaching writing to minority students, (4) reading in a writing course, (5) effective conferencing within the writing process, (6) teaching business writing, (7) listening for voice, (8) feedback, and (9) writing conferences and workshops. The collection concludes with a selection of writing assignments prepared by the contributors. (FL)

****
*   Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made   *
*   from the original document.   *
****

ED230952

Writing Teachers: What We Say About What We Do

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Michigan Council of Teachers of English
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

Fifteen essays for teachers of writing at the secondary and college levels

Collected by Stephen Tchudi, Michigan State University

Edited by Scott McNabb, Grand Rapids Junior College

Published by the Michigan Council of Teachers of English
© 1983

CS 207 614

Other Books Available Through MCTE:

Television and Teaching English

Nine articles of practical ideas about how television can *enrich* the teaching of English: teaching critical thinking skills through television; using television as a motivator in teaching; and teaching literature through the use of television are presented with suggestions for the English teacher. (Edited by Rhoda Maxwell, 1982. Costs: $ 3.25 plus $.65 to cover postage)

Language Arts Teaching: From Process to Practice

Nine articles emphasizing that "teachers who write, research, and innovate, teachers who move from theory through process to practice, are better able to plan classroom strategies, motivate students, and produce creative learners." Articles concern: teachers writing *with* students; teaching writing and revising in elementary *grades*; motivating students (of *any* age)to write poetry; reading literature aloud to students (of *any* age); and a section on the teacher as researcher and critic of good children's literature. (Edited by Kathleen Drzick, Maryellen Hains, and Karla Holloway, 1981. Costs: $ 3.25 plus $.65 to cover postage)

A Two-Way Street: Reading to Write/Writing to Read

Reviews over eighty books for children at the elementary school level with a series of practical suggestions after each review to get the children *writing*. The authors believe that "regular inclusion of literature in the elementary curriculum can lead to a dynamic interaction and integration in the language arts--writing, reading, speaking, and listening." Developed through a combined effort of the Michigan Department of Education and the MCTE.(Edited by Maryellen Hains, 1982. Costs: $ 3.50 plus $.65 to cover postage)

Evaluating a Theme

Eleven articles which emphasize recent thinking and writing concerning how teachers can improve the evaluation of their students' writing (and spend the same, or perhaps even *less,* time doing so!). Includes a brief historical review of how English teachers' evaluative techniques developed over the last 150 years; evaluation and how it should enter into the writing process; searching for alternatives to conventional methods of evaluation; evaluation and how it can affect the teaching of revising; proficiency exams, and much more. (Edited by Stephen Judy and Rhoda Maxwell, 1981. Costs: $ 3.50 plus $.65 to cover postage)

To order write: Michigan Council of Teachers of English
P.O. Box 892
Rochester, Michigan 48063

Contents

Preface by Stephen Tchudi

Language Theory and the Developmental Curriculum............5
Cherie Wilcox

Audience...17
Natalie Cole- Michta

Enhancing Writing Through Student Choice of Topics.........26
Matt Nikkari

The In-Class Journal.....................................38
Philip McKinney

Composing a Reality......................................50
Diana Pingatore

Teaching Writing to Minority Students.....................60
Neville Britto

Listening for the Voice..................................71
Molly Allison

A Reading/Writing Course for ESL Students..................80
Margaret Quesada

Reading in a Writing Course:
Bad News and Good News....................................91
Martin J. Wood

Teaching Business Writing: Theories and Strategies.......104
Jennifer Smith-Young

Whatever Became of Writing Across the Curriculum?.........113
Thomas Jannetta

A Question of Balance:
The Conference and the Workshop...........................122
Carol Hale-Doty

Effective Conferencing Within the Writing Process.........134
Celeste Resh

Stalking Elephants in Academia:
A Vision of Revision......................................144
Gwendolyn Ashbaugh

Focus on Feedback...158
Mary McInnis Roessler

Collected Writing Assignments (That Work).................166
The Authors

Preface

The authors of this collection of essays are WRITING TEACHERS.

The ambiguity in that phrase and in the title of the book is deliberate: The authors are both teachers of writing and teachers who write. Many of them teach composition at Michigan State University; a smaller number teach in schools and colleges in Michigan's lower peninsula. All were enrolled in my seminar on "College Teaching of Writing" at MSU during the spring of 1982.

In launching the seminar, I announced that the students would, in the course of ten weeks, write a book. I explained that since composition theory these days stresses writing as process and the values of peer editing and publishing, it made sense for the class to aim its writing toward actual publication, toward a real audience of fellow teachers. The first edition came out as a photocopied monograph shortly after the end of the course. A copy was sent to Scott McNabb, Publications Chair of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English, and to our delight, he judged our work worthy of broader distribution through MCTE.

I cannot claim that every last question the reader has ever had about the teaching of writing will be answered by this collection, but you will find a number of thoughtful answers to a range of interesting questions, plus some intriquing questions which have no answers (to date) but invite the concerted inquiry of school and college writing teachers.

The essays appear in a sequence that begins with theoretical issues and problems, moves through the stages of the writing process, and ends with the discussion of revision and evaluation. One can read the volume cover to cover, but most readers will want to jump around a bit, searching out essays that deal with their particular interests and teaching problems.

Some readers may be tempted to begin at the end, with a juicy collection of tried-and-true classroom activities and projects contributed by the authors. But there is a string attached: The assignments "work" only if one understands the theoretical principles and classroom agonies that went into creating them. The assignments, then, are the reader's reward for doing his or her homework and for reading, if not cover to cover, at least in some depth, WRITING TEACHERS: WHAT WE SAY ABOUT WHAT WE DO.

--Stephen Tchudi
March 1983

Language Theory and the Developmental Curriculum

Cherie Wilcox
Michigan State University

Like many teachers, I once dreaded language theory. My background was in literature and my brief undergraduate encounters with language theorists left me confused and irritated: "A bunch of jargon-mongers," I muttered. "Really, teaching is quite common sense stuff. I'll just follow the model set by the teachers I liked best." However, my first classroom experience teaching writing was a sobering one. I turned to language theory and research for some answers and I found a fascinating field of study.

In this article I propose to present a highly simplistic overview of the psycholinguistic model of learning and the relationship between thought and language. I have avoided jargon and remained general, referring to only a few specific theorists. I encourage my readers to explore the beautifully constructed and highly convincing arguments of Susanne Langer, James Britton and Frank Smith, on whose works this overview is based. Their books are stimulating, rewarding, and not nearly as hard as they appear at first glance.

The second part of this article explores some approaches to teaching which have been derived directly from theoretical considerations. The reader will probably recognize these as major battle-grounds in the field of pedagogy: individualization; interdisciplinary English; the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing; the social classroom environment; and the new role of the teacher. Other authors in Writing Teachers deal with these controversies in more detail.

I. The Concurrent Development of Thought and Spoken Language

Susanne Langer explains that the fundamental human need, the drive which sets us apart from other animals and cannot be understood in terms of animal psychology, is the need of symbolization (1980). "The symbol making function is one of man's primary activities, like eating, looking, or moving about. It is the fundamental process of his mind and goes on all the time." This primary need of man's "actuates all his apparently unzoological aims, his wistful fancies, his consciousness of value, his utterly impractical enthusiasms and his awareness of a 'beyond' filled with holiness" (pg. 40-41).

And, it is this ability to create symbols that allows humans to think. Thought is a symbolic process: we don't just *organize* reality into its natural order; we actually *create* the order of organization. We create reality based on our theories of the world and our symbols which represent the world.

So where does language fit in? One knows that there can be symbolic conceptions--thought--without language. Like a picture, or music, such concepts have meaning; yet they are too complex and contain too many interrelations to be expressed in language. Langer says: "Wherever a symbol operates, there is meaning; and conversely, different classes of experience--say, reason, intuition, appreciation--correspond to different types of symbolic mediation" (p. 97). Yet language is human kind's easiest way to manipulate symbols. "In language we have the free accomplished use of symbolization, the record of articulate conceptual thinking; without language there seems to be nothing like explicit thought whatever" (p. 103).

Newborn children find themselves in a world of confusing sense data. Nothing has any meaning; sights, sounds, touches are all stimuli, but without significance. The baby's tools, however, for starting to untangle the world are considerable: a ceaseless desire to make sense of the world; the ability to categorize experience and to develop increasingly complex hierarchies; and a society which will help to guide the child and which has already developed a language system for him or her to adopt.

Children learn about the world through an experimental method and will create a hypothesis based on their past experience. For example, "I believe that the red object is close enough for me to touch." The baby then tests the hypothesis by reaching for the object. Based on the results of this test and many others like it, children slowly explore the concept of space until their hypothesis is confirmed or rejected.

Language is learned in the same way. At first it is simply another part of that confusing environment--a very large part. All the humans around the child indulge constantly in language activities, and they even talk directly to the baby. Meanwhile, the child is making sounds, chattering and babbling. The impulse to do so is unique among animals and Langer considers it an instinct. The child listens, trying to make sense, trying to make connections. The child will soon be able to follow simple directions, like "peek-a-boo" or "turn off the light," and enjoys doing so.

In babbling children imitate sounds, but it is hard to tell exactly when these imitated sounds start to convey meaning. As James Britton states:

> from about three months, they play with sounds in a way that appears to be deliberate and certainly enjoyable; ...by the time they are six months old they play and 'practice' sounds that are new to their repertoire; and...this self-imitation leads on to deliberate imitation of sounds made by other people. (1970, pg. 38)

At some point, however, the child, who continues to babble nonsense and play with words, makes the connection between a sound, maybe "cup," and the object it represents. Language learning has a new purpose once the child discovers that everything has a name.

The child, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four months, begins to concentrate considerable energy on learning names. This interest arises from the desire to attain knowledge about the world. A child may learn the word "cup," but at first believes it to be a proper name applying only to his or her own cup. The child may operate under this hypothesis until it is refuted many times by adult usage. Eventually, after much questioning and experimentation, the child may revise the category of "cup" to include all cups and even glasses. Now the child has a better concept of "cup," a generalized concept based on function. When the child, after more experimentation and feedback from adults, divides the categories again, adding the concept of "glass," a new hierarchical order has been created. Under the function category of "utensils to drink from" there will be two shape categories: "things shaped like cups," and "things shaped like glasses."

This process of creating new hierarchies by learning new names continues throughout an individual's life. Anyone trying to learn a new field of study or a new hobby realizes that one does not get far without learning the names which signify relationships between conceptual categories, categories which didn't exist for that individual before.

Besides allowing us to name things, there is another important type of hierarchical order inherent in all language--syntax. The beginning language learner can communicate meaning, in context, by one word sentences like: "up," "go," "shoe," "finished." Although these early sentences are sometimes commands or requests, the child is often simply making an observation which could be translated as: "See, Mom, I have a shoe," or "Look, Dad, I'm finished." The child is experimenting to see if the remark will be understood, if the syntax of the sentence is clear. Children are very pleased when they have been correctly understood and the parent may simply acknowledge the statement, providing feedback: "Yes, you are finished." By seeking such feedback, the child develops successive grammars, starting with one-word sentences, moving to two-word sentences like "me go," or "go store," adding more complex relationships and hierarchies. By the age of six children have internalized most of the features of adult syntax. This process continues for adults, for as one has more complex ideas one may need to express them in new sentence constructions.

This ongoing relationship between thought and language, dynamic and exciting, allows us to make greater and greater abstractions, to manipulate these abstractions by use of symbols, and to incorporate these ideas into our theory of the world. Britton summarizes the relationship thus:

> As a child's powers of thought develop they might be seen to go through the stages of first drawing level with and then surpassing his powers of speech. Or, putting it crudely by numbers:
>
> 1. He speaks a language which embodies powers of organization he cannot achieve in thought.
> 2. He achieves the ability to organize in thought what is organized in his speech.
> 3. He exceeds the range of his powers of organization in thought by first verbalizing more complex experiences and contemplating these verbalizations.
> 4. His powers of organization in thought come to exceed his powers of organization in speech. (p. 205)

Understandably, a process which relies on constant experimentation and theory revision will not be a linear, nicely dissectable one. Many developmental psychologists have struggled to describe generalized stages of development. For the purposes of this paper I will summarize a couple of early studies, not to outline specific stages but more to give the reader an idea of the dynamic and interrelated processes of generalization, socialization, and language development.

Lev Vygotsky, studying the ability to generalize and make abstractions, asked subjects to try to make a pile of "similar" blocks based on some method of classification (1962 reprint). None of the blocks were identical and there were five different colors, six shapes, two heights, and two sizes. Nonsense names were used to define the classification system used, i.e. "lag" was written on the bottom of the tall large blocks, "bik" on flat large ones, etc. The examiner would turn over one block exposing its name; the child would try to assemble a pile of similar blocks; the examiner would turn over one of the wrong choices in the pile; and the subject would rearrange the pile based on this new information.

Some of Vygotsky's findings were: young children used no organizing principles at all, making heaps of unrelated blocks; older children used some sorts of abstract organizing principles, but applied them irregularly; and children nearing school age could apply a general principle, but were unable to see other possibilities if their first classification system was proven inaccurate. From the ages of seven to twelve, subjects had some flexibility in generalizing, but were inconsistent in applying a new principle. Through adolescence subjects gained more consistency, but were unable to explain the concepts they used. Adults could not only perform the operations, but could also explain them verbally.

Considering this slow evolution of generalization abilities, it is not surprising that in 1926 Jean Piaget described his findings that children from the ages of three to four were totally egocentric and unable to assume the viewpoint of another child (1974 reprint). In quarreling, they didn't even try to verbally justify their actions, and when participating in activities together, they talked to themselves, not to each other. From the ages of four to seven they could collaborate in action and non-abstract thought and their arguments consisted of clashes of assertions. At the ages of seven to eight, children had just started to collaborate in abstract thought and to give some reasons for their assertions in arguments. When given the task of retelling a story to each other or making mechanical explanations children aged six to seven had communication problems due to logical factors like lack of order and juxtaposition and because of egocentric factors of expression like an elliptical style and indeterminate pronouns. By the ages of seven and eight some of these problems were reduced and others disappeared showing that children were becoming more objective.

Summary

From the above explanations it should be clear that the processes of socialization, hierarchy development, and language development are interrelated in complex ways. The four part model offered by Britton describes an active process of gaps and lags which are slowly filled in as others arise. Two major points of the previous section are as follows:

(1) Children first start to take an interest in language because it is a large part of their confusing environment which they want to explore. They start out trying to learn language basically to make sense of language. And they are very pleased with each step of progress in this direction.

(2) At some point they make an amazing connection: that

they can make sounds which "mean" or symbolize abstract concepts. A new motivation arises for the use of language--using language to make sense of the world, to improve on their symbolic representation of the world. This process, too, is a joyful activity which goes on concurrently with the continuing process of making more sense of language.

Some readers may see the psycholinguistic theory as pure "common sense." Why would anyone bother to waste so much time and effort proving the obvious? However, it is important to remember that these ideas have been some time in the making and that they have met with great resistance. In fact, the behavioralists still have a strong voice in theory, research, and especially in classroom practices. The "back to basics movement" is a prime example of the ingrained behavioralistic approach of our society. As I see it, the behavioralists and the psycholinguists disagree on at least two basic points: why a child learns language and how a child learns language (or anything else, for that matter).

The behavioralists believe that the human being is motivated primarily by desire for reward and a fear of punishment. When applied to language learning, this theory supposes that children learn to speak because they are rewarded by parents for saying words and because they have to use language to have their immediate needs satisfied. Thus we have the grading system to force people to learn.

Piaget decided to watch children interacting to see whether these were children's primary purposes in speaking. Instead he found that children use language much more to talk to themselves, to play with words and sounds, and to ask questions. They were using language to explore ideas rather than to manipulate others. When they did attempt to communicate, it was more often to communicate their ideas than to fulfill immediate needs.

Behavioralists would say that the child learns language through rote imitation of adult language, not through an active process of generalization and concept formation: that children learn sounds, words and sentences without any idea of what they mean and assign meaning long afterwards. No wonder our schools believe in rote memorization of grammar rules, vocabulary words, and rules of phonics instead of providing the child with a full, real language experience to learn and generalize from.

Yet this assumption does not explain some simple observable facts. Why, for instance, do children form consecutive grammars? The child has never heard a sentence like "me go" in adult usage, so how does it happen that all children produce such sentences without a model to imitate? The answer is that children develop their own grammar rules, based on their experience with adult language, and they are actively testing their rules and making further generalizations. (Like the child, previously described, that experimented with the "red object.")

II. Some Traits of a Developmental Curriculum

A curriculum based on psycholinguistic theory will have certain predictable traits. Many of these traits are not new, but have been used by intuitive classroom teachers for years. But new teachers and administrators have the support of a consistent theory which is being forwarded by both scholary research and by the practical applications of innovative teachers. Here are some of the traits which I see as most necessary for a truly developmental curriculum--a curriculum based on the changing needs, interests, and abilities of students and which utilizes their natural learning processes.

(A) Beginning Reading and Writing: Traditionally, reading and writing have been viewed as entirely different tasks from learning to speak. Educators have emphasized the differences between spoken language and printed language, rather than concentrating on the similarities. But the process of literacy learning should start much like the process of learning to speak. A child's environment should be full of written language and the reading and writing activities of adults. This is an element which, just because of its simplicity, cannot be overlooked: just as a child in a speech-free environment would not learn to speak, a child will be disadvantaged from a literacy standpoint if the adults in his environment are not actively involved in acts of reading and writing. And adults must be willing to include the child when asked -- to interpret labels, read the bulletin board, read stories, answer questions about the newspaper, etc.

Children have a built-in advantage in learning literacy which they lacked when learning to speak: they already know and produce many words; they can understand and produce syntactically sound constructions; and they already know the sounds of speech which are related, even if exceptions abound, to the spelling system of written words. Thus, they already have considerable experience manipulating language as a symbolic system. In fact, Britton claims that children use speech for many of the same reasons adults use writing. They have been playing with words and sounds, at varying degrees of sophistication since they first started to babble, so enjoyment and production of "poetic" expression is not really an unfamiliar experience. They have also been telling stories and using language to "get something done," so fiction and narrative should be accessible to children as well as "transactional" writing--that which is meant to inform or persuade the reader. (For more on expressive," "poetic," and "transactional" writing, and their relationship to each other, see Britton, 1970).

Just as with learning to speak, the child learning literacy may need time to "play" at the task--to go through the motions (as in babbling and nonsense words) without the meaning. They should be encouraged to "write" even if this means making zig-zags vvv across the lines of the paper. They should be allowed to "read" even if this means using the pictures in a picture book to help them guess at the meaning on the page. Sooner or later, after much encouragement and practice, the revelation will occur as it did for the child of two: this set of marks on the page is a symbol for a word he or she already knows. Soon he or she can "possess" words by being able to read and write them. The pleasure with the discovery will lead to a pure enjoyment of literacy if no one steps in and starts to make it an unpleasant task with grammar drills, vocabulary words, spelling lists, phonics tests, and boring readers.

I recently visited a kindergarten classroom in which the teacher was promoting literacy in many painless ways.* Words permeated the environment--every object had a placard with its name on it, "cupboard" or "closet," at child-eye level. Children signed their name to all their art-work, even if the teacher had to help by writing the name on a card for the child to copy. Books, chosen by the children, were read aloud to them at story time. When they learned a song the verses were displayed on a large easel in plain view. When they drew pictures of clowns they were asked to make up a clown name and write it on the picture, with the help of the teacher if needed. And they compiled a "story book," on a barnyard theme, in which each child contributed a picture of an animal and dictated a short explanation of the picture which was written up by the teacher.

(B) Generalized Stages of Development: Stephen Tchudi (Judy) makes a fine argument for this trait (in his ABC's of Literacy), so I would like to quote him here:

> Achieving sequence and articulation has been complicated by a tradition of having the direction of school systems determined by higher levels, rather than by the personal growth patterns of children... Students are expected to measure up to whatever standard the next higher level tries to enforce. The word gets passed down: The colleges tell high schools that the preparation of entering students is abominable. The high school teachers tell the junior high teachers that their students don't measure up to high school standards... Why, one asks, should anyone concentrate the entire fourth grade year on preparation for anything other than the present? Wouldn't it be more satisfactory to work hard on fourth grade reading and writing activities than to

---

* Rita Luks, teacher; Wardcliff Elementary School, Okemos, Michigan.

> worry about unknown tasks in the future, be they in fifth grade or thirteenth? (1980, pg. 85)

Tchudi provides two general schemata for a developmental curriculum based on the child's needs and interests. The first, based on G. Robert Carlen (1974), but adapted by Tchudi, emphasizes the child's language interest at a particular stage:

> 1. Unconscious Delight (Grades K-6). Engagement with language and literature for the sheer pleasure and satisfaction of a good story, the sounds of words, or the enchantment of the unfamiliar.
> 2. Vicarious Experience (Grades 6-9). Using language to extend the dimensions of one's universe to learn more about the world and people who inhabit it.
> 3. Seeing Oneself (Grades 8-10). Reading and writing used to explore personal experience and to see those experiences in the light of others'.
> 4. Exploring Consciousness (Grade 10 up). Language as a means of learning about human issues, problems and values and coming to understand the human condition and the perennial questions facing humankind.
> 5. Aesthetic Experience (Grade 10 up). Enjoyment of language and literature because of conscious appreciation of form, structure, and content. (pg. 179)

This pattern, in conjunction with the developmental patterns, complements children's growing ability to generalize and to see language and themselves objectively. The second, more general, classifications offered by Tchudi also support Carlen's point of view, but perhaps are more helpful because they are more general, and are based solidly on the developmental patterns we have already seen:

> - from personal and private uses of language to public. Youngest children read and write principally for themselves, to clarify their own experiences. As children mature, they increasingly draw upon language to deal with and control issues outside themselves.
> - from concrete problems to abstract issues. At the earliest stages in life, young people engage in what Piaget calls concrete reasoning, where they must see and touch to be able to comprehend. As they mature, they increase their powers to use symbols and words to manipulate ideas.
> - from spoken language to written forms. The unconscious delight of youngest children in both literature and composing is principally oral. Children listen, talk, chant, and recite first; they read and write later.

(C) Individualization: While keeping in mind generalized stages of development, educators must remember that an individual's learning process is a non-linear struggle which will accelerate and regress as one task is achieved and a harder one is attempted. Mistakes are not only acceptable, but are the necessary consequence of a process which is primarily based on hypothesis testing, experimentation, and taking chances. Any time a child tries a new type of sentence construction, uses a new word, or takes on a harder writing task, mistakes will abound. It could even appear to the teacher that the child needs more work on punctuation, grammar, or spelling. Usually these problems will work themselves out with time, more experimentation, and growing confidence with the task.

Furthermore, Frank Smith has described that everyone has idiosyncratic "learning styles" which are the result of personality and environment (1975). Some children will be more daring about taking chances; others, fearing mistakes, will be more cautious explorers. Some will need to talk out ideas before writing them; others will need quiet time alone to think out their ideas. Unless educators accept such variations, and unless the learning environment allow adequate versatility for children to employ their already-developed learning styles, the child (especially a young child) will feel inadequate and, unable to easily adapt a new learning style, may give up on certain fields of study. Learning styles can develop, of course, from less efficient to more efficient, but that too is a slow, uneven process.

(D) Interdisciplinary Learning: Since thought and language are so inextricably linked, the current system which separates the "subject areas" from "language study" is hopelessly outdated. Students start to see language abilities as unnecessary for, and separate from, their daily tasks in other classes, in social endeavors, and in understanding themselves. Most English teachers have felt the futility of arguing with a student who says: "Why do I have to learn to write? I just want to be an engineer." By that age our students feel that language is just the topping on the cake rather than the basis and substance of thought.

Most subject area teachers seem to believe that only English teachers are responsible for students' language abilities. They will assign poorly written textbooks, little written work, and may even ignore listening and speaking as a means by which students can learn. Then they blame English teachers when students do not listen, speak, read, or write well when an assignment is finally made (usually to write a report or research paper). Similarly, English teachers have been slow to realize that to improve as language users, students must do more than just read literature and write about it. They need to do more than write sample paragraphs and "trial-run" five paragraph papers. They need to develop their ideas through listening, speaking, reading, and writing about things that interest them--sociology, biology, art or modern music. And they need to write in all of the "function categories": poetic, expressive and transactional.

(E) Socialization: Learning and language are social activities. As Piaget suggests in his writing, children may first start trying to be objective because they want to support their assertions when arguing with each other. Although we often get our ideas, or hypotheses, from books and media sources, we more often get them when talking with other people. And we usually turn to other people when we have a question; the right person can answer your question much more quickly than a trip to the library, or at least he or she can give you the right resource to look at. And when we have a new idea, we try it out on a trusted friend to get feedback. Thus, hypothesis formation and hypothesis testing are both social activities.

But the current system assumes that learning is a process which involves the teacher and the textbook as the major sources of information, with the teacher as the only legitimate source of feedback. Certainly the teacher should be an important source of information and feedback, but not the only one. As it is, if students help each other learn, they are suspected of "cheating." And how often does the teacher refer students to possible sources in the community? How often does anyone other than the teacher view the final product and respond? How often are students allowed to use class time to talk out ideas rather than passively listening to the teacher dispense information?

(F) Integrating the Language Arts: It ought to be evident by now that speaking, listening, reading, and writing are activities which reinforce each other; all are just facets of total language experience. Listening to good storytellers and practicing one's own storytelling abilities will reinforce talents needed to write good stories. Writing stories enhances one's appreciation of literature, and reading literature helps one be a better story writer, a better storyteller, and a more perceptive story listener. Listening to a good speaker about, for example, science, or arguing with a friend gives one not only new ideas about the subject, but also new ideas about methods of organization or style which can be used in one's own writing and which will make one a better speaker, listener, and reader. Concepts of audience, voice, appropriateness of style and organization may differ between different types of tasks, but the elements are the same. For too long educators have separated language learning into unrelated categories: in one class children will practice reading, and in another they will learn to write sentences; in another they will read and respond to literature, and in another class, if time permits, they will do "creative writing." As they get older, listening is reduced to lecture note taking and speaking means answering questions in the last five minutes of class.

(G) The Teacher Role: Throughout this article I have referred to "the student" or "the child" as the principal learner whose processes I have been describing. Here I would like to examine the teacher as learner, since we too share the same basic learning processes as our students. We can no longer be passive learners, believing the sales gimmicks of text publishers, nor can we allow ourselves to be harrassed into a "back to basics" approach. We need to be actively learning how to be better teachers. We need to get new ideas through reading current journals and books, attending professional conferences, and talking to other teachers. We must try our new ideas out in our classrooms and observe the results. Like our students, we can expect some regression and failures when we try new approaches or when we try an approach with new students. Remember, you're not practiced at this yet and students need time to adjust. They aren't used to being asked to share ideas or help each other. You may be the first teacher who's expected them to do this new thing. One teacher complained that although group editing "worked" for her more competent students, she tried it once with her remedial students and gave up. It didn't work the first time.

The writers of this book are all teachers who are struggling to become better teachers. We have made observations in classrooms and have tried methods with varying degrees of success. In the course of writing our articles, we have taken our "hunches," read new information on our topics, hashed out ideas in heated discussions, performed classroom experiments, relayed new information to each other, asked questions, and sometimes even agreed with each other. Finally we had to make our ideas clear for an audience. In the process of writing these articles we have had to clarify our thoughts for ourselves, and that is the beautiful fruit that writing promises all learners, even teachers.

Sources Cited

Britton, James. Language and Learning. Maryland: Penguin Books, 1970.

Judy, Stephen. The ABC's of Literacy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980.

Langer, Susanne. Philosophy in a New Key. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 3rd edition, 1980.

Piaget, Jean. The Language and Thought of the Child. Trans. Majorie Gabain. New York: Meridian, 1974.

Smith, Frank. Comprehension and Learning. New York: Holt, Rinehard & Winston, 1975.

Vygotsky, Lev. Thought and Language. Trans. Eugenia Haufmann and Gertrude Vakar. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1962.

Audience

Natalie Cole-Michta
State University of New York at Buffalo

Audience, that all-too-ephemeral concept bandied about by teachers of writing, had somehow fastened its nebulous self onto my imagination. I revved up "old Audience" for class discussions of papers, in my presentations of assignment topics, gleefully inserted it in end comments, and generally introduced it around as an old buddy I had known myself as an undergraduate writer. It wasn't until the eighth week of my Spring term class that I took a good, hard look at Audience and noticed how indistinct it appeared around the edges, and I began to wonder if it even belonged in my class at all.

I found myself making two lists on the blackboard: one represented possible audiences for student papers that had just been returned to students in my class (a truly dreadful batch of erasable bond), and one represented the audiences for which the same group of students wrote in their other classes and in the "real world." The lists looked something like this:

Possible Audiences For This Paper

Teacher
Students in the class
Students outside the class
Parents
Student newspaper
Popular fiction audience
Recommendation
  (for job or college admission)
Police report

Audiences You Most Frequently Write For

Teacher: research papers
  lab reports
  essay exams
Letters, personal or business

In the class discussion of the two lists, one student noted that, "really, everything we write is for a teacher who will ultimately grade it." This shouldn't be a big surprise, but the lack of correspondence between the two lists and the difficulty students had in transmitting skills from one writing situation to another surprised me quite a bit. I decided to examine how teachers of writing use audience in their classes, and what motives they have for doing so. Before discussing the results of a questionnaire on audience to which twenty-two teachers responded, a brief, selected survey of composition-theory literature on audience is in order.

Wayne Booth suggests about writing that "in the very moment of initial conception...a rhetorical aspect is contained within the conception; the subject is thought of as *something which can be made public*, something that can be made into a communicated work" (1961). Mentioning William Faulkner and other contemporary writers of "serious fiction" (a questionable label), who maintain that the writing they do is "for themselves" and that writing with a concept of audience in mind would be a sort of pandering, Booth observes that these writers are still postulating a reader, namely, themselves, causing "the distinction between expressive and rhetorical theories of literature [to] disappear" (p. 109). If it is true that as writers we all begin our writing with a sense of rhetorical context, what is that context most likely to be for the beginning writer?

James Britton in "The Student's Writing," examines students' sense of audience, dividing the resulting audiences into four major ones: "self as audience," "teacher as audience," "a known audience, other than the teacher," and "an unknown audience" (1970, pg. 38). Britton discovered in the 2,200 writing samples taken from children ages eleven to eighteen years that the "self as audience" category makes up "a very small category" in English classes, only 0.3 of all written work. Britton, who dislikes directed writing assignments, does not discuss teachers pre-teaching different writing contexts to students, but he does emphasize the importance of a specifically conceived audience to students: "children should write about what matters to them *to someone who matters*"(pg. 30, emphasis mine). James Moffett has stressed the same idea in *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*:

> The issue I want to make clear, in any case, is that the *significance of the responder influences the writer enormously*. This is the nature of rhetoric itself. But if the real intent of the writing is extraneous to the writing--on a completely different plane, as when the student turns in a bland bit of trivia to show his indifference to adult demands--then the effect is actually *to dissociate writing from real intent* and to pervert the rhetorical process into a weird irony. (1968, pg. 194, emphasis mine)

Unfortunately, this desired audience, one who should "matter" to the writer, is not the audience students have in reality.

Following up on his idea of students' need for this audience, Britton found in a sample of 500 male and female children that:

> As for the different kinds of audience, in any year there was never less than 95% [of their work] written for a teacher audience... But if you make a discrimination between different kinds of teacher audience--between teacher audience where the expectation is some sort of response or follow-up versus the teacher-as-examiner within that 95% each year, the increasing domination of the teacher-as-examiner audience was very marked. (1978)

Both Britton and Moffett suggest the undesirability of a writing situation defined and limited entirely by an artificial audience (one like the teacher-as-examiner who does not exist as respondent, but only in their absolute function as graders). I believe their objections to this artificiality point to the overkill of a product-approach to writing in which teachers make a final judgement on a "closed" paper, rather than making intermittent responses to a piece of writing as it develops. In effect, Britton has echoed a concern raised eloquently by Richard Lanham: "Students will remain flaccid and unmotivated until some connection is made between writing and the motives their culture really honors (1974, pg. 13). Lanham points out the inextricable relationship between subject and style, intent and audience, and he contrasts two types of jargon. The first, a gripping instance of psychologese from the Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis, uses absurdly inflated language to place its readers at a professional (and hence protective) distance from its subject--as Lanham bluntly puts it, "whether men watching dirty movies can voluntarily avoid having an erection." The second example of jargon, which is considerably more lively and in which style and subject work together rather than the one obscuring the other as in the first example, is an East Village hippie's explanation of sexual etiquette as he knows it. Lanham discusses both examples, noting that each is dictated by the writer's conception of his audience. Each sample, as written, perpetuate (and perhaps elevate) the writers' status in their respective cliques. And as Moffett and Britton have already suggested, teachers of writing need to make the same connection between audience and student writing that Lanham's knowledgeable users of jargon have made (pg. 38).

Articles in 1976, 1977 and 1979 issues of English Journal by Smelstor and Weiher, Hoffman and Schifsky, and Zimmerman, focused on assignment-making and its necessary link to audience, and tried to incorporate this vital connection in directed assignments.

In "Designing Writing Assignments," Hoffman and Schifsky emphasize the teacher's responsibility to recognize which audiences the student needs or wants to write to:

> The writing teacher who is aware of the writer's need to make these choices in aim and mode can shape his assignment so that students can respond with a discourse whose primary aim is identifiable and in an appropriate mode. Such a teacher can then evaluate the discourse in terms of the chosen aim and mode and be much surer that his response to the student's work is accurate and helpful to the student. (1977)

Although Hoffman and Schifsky prescribe greater teacher understanding of the student writer's audience aim, they do not tell us how to help the student develop such a context if he or she is having difficulty with it. What they say about the greater accuracy and help of evaluations when this understanding is reached is borne out in my personal teaching experience: evaluation criteria for second drafts of student papers are much easier to talk about because by the second draft the student has usually further defined or narrowed the audience to which he or she is appealing (or if you prefer, the projected aspect of him- or herself which the student seeks to satisfy through writing).

Marvin Zimmerman in "The Creative Writing Class: Writers In Search of An Audience" (1979), urges teachers to mine the audience resources around them, to make each assignment audience-specific by projecting a series of concrete mediums (such as yearbooks, theater productions, literary magazines published by students, student newspapers). This teaching strategy broadens the audience so that it extends outside the immediate class.

Marjorie Smelstor and Carol Weiher suggest in "Using Popular Culture to Teach Composition" (1976) that advertisements are a good place to start to teach students audience-specific writing because 1) "No one else has as good a sense of audience," 2) ads provide a handy metaphor--"marketing," and 3) "ads...combine verbal and visual packaging techniques." Smelstor and Weiher are correct in their awareness that advertising is a writing context which is both familiar and attractive to students, but the idea of advertisement as the writing context from which to leap off into other writing contexts is troubling for the following reasons. The very pragmatic motives of words whose job is solely to "quick-sell" seem to force students toward the "transactional" end of Britton's writing spectrum, and argue against the legitimacy of writing that has a less easily discernable purpose than "selling" an idea or product. Terms like "marketing" and "packaging" emphasize writing as a product the writer should neatly wrap up, a notion which subverts the whole writing-as-process, revision-oriented approach to the teaching of writing. Still one more fault of this restrictive sales context is that it tempts writers to "plug into" trite and true rhetorical formulas from which it is difficult to escape into fresher, more challenging writing contexts. As Lanham says in discussing advertising as "America's real composition class, "Faced with advertising, the dedicated teacher of prose composition is like the saintly fireman in the cliche, charging hell with a bucket of ice water" (1974, pg. 8).

I distributed a questionnaire to teachers of college writing (sophmore level) at Michigan State University in the Spring Term, 1982, hoping to answer some of the questions I have already raised about audience. Twenty-two teachers responded to the following questionnaire. I might say here that I do not intend to discuss every questionnaire item or every response to a given item, but to select what appear to be the most fruitful and illuminating responses on various items. The questionnaire I distributed looked like this:

> I'm circulating this questionnaire to all teachers of English 213 as part of a research project on the connection between successful writing assignments and audience or rhetorical context. By successful writing assignments I mean those directed writing activities that lead to what you consider to be good student writing--"good" defined by your own criteria. By "rhetorical context" I simply mean whether or not students write with a specific audience in mind, either an audience of their peers or a real or imagined audience outside the class.
>
> 1. When you use directed (that is, any assignment that is more delimited than "write about anything you want to write about") writing assignments, do you talk about audience when preparing students to write?
>
>   Yes___ No___
>
>   Rate How important you consider this: essential___
>   important___
>   not very important___
>   Comments: unimportant___
>
> 2. Describe your three most successful paper assignments, quoting them verbatim if possible.
>
> 3. In the above assignments, do teacher presentation of topic and any pre-writing exercises you use include the concept of audience? If so, specify the audience(s) talked about for each one.
>
> 4. If you present the concept of audience to your class independent of specific assignment presentations, please state:
>   a. When you do so in the term (what week, which

paper) 1st, 2nd, 3rd, out of how many?

b. Briefly, tell how you explain the concept of audience in the writing process to student writers:

5. List all the specific audiences that have been talked about in your 213 class this term by teacher and students, indicating in parentheses any that were assigned.

6. In what ways do you think your use of rhetorical context help students either write better or experience the writing process more fully?

In response to item 1, "When you use directed writing assignments, do you talk about audience when preparing students to write?", 22 answered yes; 11/22 considered it essential, 2/22 essential to important, 8/22 important, and only 1/22 designated audience as "not very important."

It might be interesting to look at the exception first. The respondent who found audience a negligible teaching tool made the following remark: "I do not like what I see as a false dichotomy between 'self-expression' and 'communication'"; this teacher uses a peer group audience in her class, but sees it as "really merely an extension of self" for the student writer. She raises the issue of expansion of audience to include known and unknown audiences outside of the class. But is such expansion helpful in helping students find a "literary self?" Eleven of the teachers polled had discussed specific audiences in class in connection with particular assignments, the audiences most frequently aimed for were readers of the editorial pages and movie review sections of the student newspaper, and employers with whom students sought job interviews. Five teachers tried to teach audience by exploding the tradition of teacher-as-examiner in their classrooms. Some comments from these teachers were:

1) "I 'de-emphasize' my role as teacher-audience for my students' papers. And I emphasize that they have to imagine a specific, real-life audience for their writing."

   Audiences this teacher used: Fable assignment; children's magazines, adult magazines, specific age groups. Public correspondence; job applications, grad. school applications, complaint letters.

2) "On the first day of class, I emphasize class members as audience, NOT just the teacher."

   Audiences: Conduct an interview with a professional in your field; gear the interview toward a student audience. Write on anything you wish; produces many letter formats, to audiences ranging from friends, to Dept. Chairpersons, to the student newspaper.

3) "I try to get them to write as if they were publishing a certain type of writing. Thus, to be successful, they must take into consideration their audience, purpose, genre (I often ask students to focus their writing by keeping a specific audience in mind)."

Audiences: Prove-a-point; using any method (narrative, argument, stream of consciousness, science fiction, etc.). "The point need not be weighty, but it must be something of personal importance to the writer and must be something he/she knows about. It may be directed to a 'general audience,' but I have suggested that some students focus the paper by giving it a more limited audience, i.e., readers of a conservative magazine."

Other uses of audience surfaced. Three teachers mentioned the use of audience as a problem-solving technique when an individual writer is having trouble. Only one teacher mentioned audience in connection with the limitations of peer group audiences, noting that the use of audience "makes writing seem real--although peer audience is contrived--but it gives the student a sense that he is a writer and that someone wants to read his/her work." This teacher brings up the idea of students learning to be an audience, an idea shared by six of the questionnaire respondents. Here are some of their comments:

1) "My students' audience is, first an audience of peers. I think when it works, it works largely by helping the writer feel comfortable writing. By eliminating some of the terror of writing. Ease."

2) "There's usually just one audience--the class. Sometimes there's the class plus an imaginary audience...the unknown is frightening. By coming to know their audience, students reduce the possibility of panic."

3) "I no longer use assignments but I DO try to help students' awareness of audience--mostly by being one, and letting them be audiences to each other."

4) "They have a sense that what they're writing is not just for English 213, that they are not operating in a vacuum."

Finally, several of the teachers who answered the questionnaire expressed doubt about the usefulness of audience as a teaching tool:

1) "To be honest I don't think my comments about audience make one whit of difference. They write for themselves and/or for friends, with whom they would share the work anyway. And some just write for a grade!"

2) "It's hard to 'use' this concept. However, I think what we do is to make them aware that in some contexts, writing is outward directed. It helps them to learn about the process because it forces them to understand that specific contexts--with specific readers--means that readers have specific requirements, such as form and tone. Also, it shows them that writing proceeds from the personal to the public, from the process to the product."

3) "I hope it allows them to shift emphasis from mechanics and diction to content during the initial stages of writing. I suspect that this is hardly universal and will probably be abandoned once the students leave my class."

Some important things to note that came out of the questionnaire were: none of the teachers polled use the concept "audience" divorced from particular writing assignments; many let it develop out of assignments as successive drafts were gone through; most teachers are aware of the "artificial" context that students have learned to write in and believe that peer group audience in a writing workshop plays a vital part in mitigating the stageness of a teacher-as-examiner audience. Some teachers deliberately try to change their role in students' eyes, by various methods. Few teachers addressed the problem of helping students to transfer their writing skills from one writing context to another progressively in the course of an academic term or semester.

For myself, I breakdown writing contexts into "artificial" (the traditional academic context which posits as its audience the teacher-as-examiner), "practical" (a writing context that mirrors or resembles an actual writing task the students would undertake in situations outside the classroom), and "exploratory" (a writing context that is new to the student, one that he or she has not experienced before), and this suggests to me that writing contexts are not neatly divisible, and that teaching them as completely discrete units carries with it the danger of, as Moffett describes, "dissociating writing from real intent." Ideally, assignments should be designed, or students should be allowed to generate them, so that they span all three contexts. Most important, students and teachers both need to know who their audience is.

Audience and purpose are siamese twins in the writing process. My critical survey, personal observations, and synthesis of the information yielded by the questionnaire all add up to one very simple statement a teacher made about how audience helps students to become better writers and participate more fully in the writing process: "It gives them a sense of authenticity in the writing process." To make writing real, to have it generate its own meaning for the student and not just for the teacher, we teachers need to re-evaluate the terms on which Audience will enter our classrooms.

Sources Cited

Booth, Wayne. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Britton, James. "An Interview with James Britton, Tony Burgess, and Harold Rosen," by Louise Rosen. *English Journal*, Nov. 1978, pgs. 50-58.

Britton, James. "The Student's Writing." *Explorations in Children's Writing*, ed. Eldonna L. Evertts. Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1970.

Hoffman and Schifsky. "Designing Writing Assignments." *English Journal*, Dec. 1977, pgs. 41-31.

Lanham, Richard. *Revising Prose*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1979.

Lanham, Richard. *Style: An Anti-Textbook*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974.

Moffett, James. *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1968.

Smelstor, Marjorie and Weiher, Carol. "Using Popular Culture to Teach Composition." *English Journal*, Oct. 1976, pg. 43.

Zimmerman, Marvin. "The Creative Writing Class: Writers In Search of An Audience." *English Journal*, Oct. 1979.

Enhancing Writing Through Student Choice of Topics

Matt Nikkari
Michigan State University

My initial reactions to the news that I was to teach a writing course at MSU are still vivid. I was then working part-time as a property appraiser and had arrived home late one Tuesday night. Just as I entered the house the phone rang, and dropping an armful of bureaucratic excretia, I answered. On the other end of the line was one of the secretaries from the English department (God bless her diligence in tracking me down) who told me that, if I accepted, I had been given an assistantship to teach writing at MSU.

I immediately accepted the job. At last, here was the real thing--a chance to function as a real member of the academic community (and not get yelled at by any more irate property owners). However, this joyful state lasted in its pure form less than the time it takes to smoke half a cigarette. I was still elated over my new lot in life, but now sensed other feelings taking precedence. I thought, "My God! What do I know about teaching a writing course?"

This panic marked the beginning of a desperate search for an effective class structure--desperate because I had to have my course set up in a matter of days and begin teaching it in exactly one week. From the first, I focused on assignment topics as the key to a successful writing course. If my students were going to be there to write, then what do I have them write about? What follows is a brief relation of how this search began, what kinds of questions I had (and still deal with), and how I incorporated the fruits--and failures-- of my labor. Throughout, I am advocating the use of student generated assignment topics as the most effective way to improve and encourage student writing.

Orientation sessions, provided to new instructors, did much to alleviate the uneasiness and doubt that I and the other novice instructors felt. We were introduced to a variety of possible course outlines and theories of composition such as the student-centered approach in James Moffett's Teaching the Universe of Discourse (1968).

But I was still worried about what to do and how to do it. Out of feelings of panic, I grasped the only structure that I had any familiarity with (the one used on me as a student in a writing class): rhetorically based writing topics, a series of lectures that "taught" the principles behind assignments, preplanned lectures that were strictly focused, etc. In other words, the kind of class that makes students feel more like they are running an obstacle course than taking a writing course. I wasn't overly thrilled by my lack of originality, but I thought, "At least I have something to start with."

Modeling writing topics along roughly rhetorical lines led to such exciting assignments as "Why I Am Majoring in ___" and "Describe a Close Friend or Family Member." Each assignment was explained by a handout outlining the purposes and definitions involved, and I had a lecture to accompany these. Overall, the resulting writings were about as dynamic as a mud fence and only mirrored the lack-luster quality of the assignments. Sensitive to this, and having feared that this might happen, I intensified my examination of writing assignments, and writing topics in particular. I began to search more deeply for answers to some questions that arose from readings and discussions in my own classes about the nature of composition. From here, I started to develop a clearer idea of what these questions implied and experimented with assignment topics until I became convinced that topics originating from the students themselves are the best means for answering these questions.

If students are to believe that their writing has relevence and value...

The foundations upon which good writing is based must be more than some performance to a strictly prescribed assignment which, to the student, becomes only another class-required exercise. The best way to avoid this is to allow students to tap their own interests as a source for writing. I am in no position to dictate what the interests are for a class of twenty-two individuals from ten or more majors. Thus, if we believe that good writing comes from having something to say, then we must realize that our students would be in a better position to write well if allowed to write on something of interest to them.

The most effective way to foster this is to acknowledge that a student's interests can be stimulated by using the experiential backgrounds of each student. What are these interests and experiences? My students are adults, and I have found that they have been through an interesting variety of experiences and are willing to share these experiences in writing if given the chance. Many of my students are facing their last few terms in college and must consider the realities of life in the "real world." They often use their papers to explore the hopes and doubts that arise as they prepare themselves for whatever awaits them after college. Others are in Greek organizations and they sometimes use their writings as a place to respond to the occasional attacks that fraternities and sororities come under. Often, one or two of my students are older and have been through failed marriages, the military, or the birth of a first child. They write to put these things into perspective for themselves in comparison to other segments of their lives.

Because of this rich diversity in our students' lives (from hobbies, past occupations, the demands and advantages of their major, etc.), we would be ignoring a great resource if we failed to take advantage of this for paper topics. As teachers, we can't assign experiences or interests, but we can allow students to go to their own lives--past, present, and future--as a place to find something to say. We would be adding validity to student writing and confirming all our students' uniqueness by giving them the chance to incorporate themselves more directly into their writing. They can do this best when allowed to choose their own topics, and our job is to help them sift through their interests to find something to write on--hopefully something more than how much they can drink or how great they think tacos are.

One thing that I noticed my students doing with narrowly defined topics was to "bend" them to suit their own tastes. For example, I once gave the assignment "Describe a Memorable Experience." I thought that I had explained the assignment in enough depth (everything except three-part harmony) so that it was clear to everyone, yet too many papers were dull and incomplete. One student had written about a weekend of wild but good-natured bacchanalia, but none of the wildness or good cheer showed through in the paper. What did come out well was a part in the middle of the paper dealing with the start of two friendships that had arisen from the experience and was still important to the student. This was what her paper was really about, but the assigned topic had limited her ability to develop her own ideas.

In a way, this sounds like I am undermining my own argument in favor of student generated topics: If students are writing from their own experiences and backgrounds even in assigned topics, then why complain? Good question, and to answer it with another: Why, if students show a desire to rely on their own resources in writing papers, should we make the job more complicated with topics that impose constraints? This only forces students to adapt their opinions, feelings, and beliefs to fit the framework demanded by assigned topics. Even though students will draw on themselves in a topic like "Why I Chose MSU," their ideas are forcibly channeled into a form that may not be the most effective vehicle for them. Occasionally, something else comes out in their writing that sparks enthusiasm, is dwelt on, and comprises the only interesting and well developed part of their paper. Similar to the example above, another student writing the same assignment began by recalling a family reunion and tried to convey her thoughts about the continuity of life while watching the several generations present. An interesting idea, but pretty broad for a short paper and her writing lacked clarity. However, a part of the paper that described her father as he held his first, and new-born, grandchild was well developed and the student successfully revised the paper using this scene.

When these things occur, it looks as if students had misunderstood, ignored, or mishandled the assignment when actually they had submerged the original topic to write on one with more personal interest. In the examples above, the writings were not wasted because there was something trying to be said. The danger in this situation is to the student who is bound too much by the limits of the topic and only sets out to "write what the teacher wants." Topics that are originated by the students are a way to provide assignments where something can be said that is of interest to the students. This approach minimizes the I-can't-think-of-anything-to-say syndrome for no one is devoid of at least some degree of feeling, conflict, aspiration, etc. These are the resources that we should be encouraging our student writers to exploit. More elaboration in the presentation of assignments is not the best way to decrease potential confusion. Even when made "crystal clear," enforced topics are more apt to lead to the constipation that arises when students must tailor their perceptions and realities to someone else's. Thinking about student experiences and interests in relation to these concerns led me to wonder how these elements are singled out and transferred to composition--thus the next question:

If discovery and purpose are important to good writing...

The concept of discovery has been given considerable attention by people like Donald Murray. He defines writing as "the process of using language to discover meaning in experience and communicate it" (1978). But the idea of discovery does not refer to some ephemeral, mystical act that carries the writer away on wings of literary rapture. Because discovery is central to the writing process, I think that a solid, functional definition of the term is needed here.

Linda Flower and John Hayes have some useful perceptions that help to clarify discovery, and they point out some of the problems that can arise from misunderstanding it:

> First of all, because "discovery" emphasizes the rather glamourous experience of "Eureka, now I see it," it obscures the fact that writers don't _find_ meanings,

> they *make* them. A writer in the act of discovery is hard at work searching memory, forming concepts, and forging a new structure of ideas, while at the same time trying to juggle all the constraints imposed by his or her purpose, audience, and language itself. Discovery, the event, and its product, new insights, are only the end results of a complicated intellectual process...(1980).

This view recognizes the interplay of elements in composing and the fact that there are enough limitations on students (purpose, audience, etc.) without the added constraint of an assigned topic. It also points out that discovery has often been seen as something akin to myth and metaphor rather than as a concrete part of the writing process. Failure to acknowledge this can lead students into self-defeating strategies. They may be led to believe that discovery is a way to unlock hidden warehouses of insights and perceptions that are tucked away in some yet-to-be-discovered corner of the mind. Or, students may feel that these things can be found in books, films, and other external sources if only they dig hard and deep enough. When this fails, the myth of discovery tells students to rely on their own experiences. However, all this time they have been unable to "find" something to say because their ideas about what they need or want to say are vague and unformed. Ill-defined and conflicting experiences, perceptions, and ideas resulting from a reliance on the mythical notion of discovery lead to frustration because these are precisely the things that need to be discovered. The myth neglects to tell the writer that experience is only the raw material from which new concepts are built, and it is this creation that is at the focus of the writing process.

When the danger of misunderstanding discovery is seen, we can help our students avoid the possible pitfalls that can be disastrous to the writing process. Also, if we are to lend importance to our students' backgrounds as a source for writing, then we need to clearly define the concept of discovery so as not to undermine their writing from the beginning.

Discovery is, then, a problem-solving process that leads to the creation of ideas and meanings rather than a tool for sifting meaning from outside of the self. It is a technique for resolving the rhetorical problems that act as obstacles to writing until they are solved (obstacles like the determination of audience, tone, purpose, etc.). If we see discovery as creating meaning, not finding it, then the use of student generated topics can minimize complications for student writers. Assigned topics lessen creative discovery by dictating something to be written on. As mentioned, students may adapt an enforced topic to their own needs, interests, etc. thereby illustrating the fact, pointed out by Flower and Hayes, that "writers themselves create the problems they solve...people simply rewrite an assignment or situation to make it commesurate with their own skills, habits, or fears" (1980). Allowing students to write on their own topics puts a stress on discovery as a response to a goal, interest, or problem in a way that is self-defined and of more immediate validity to them.

The most important aspect of the discovery process is the realization that the writer's own motivations, goals, or objectives are the propelling forces behind composition. These are the primary products of discovery and, once clearly resolved in the writer's mind, drive and frame the ensuing composition. The effects that the writer wants to have on the reader, the relationship the writer wants to establish with the reader, the attempt to construct a lucid framework for conveying meaning, etc. are all derived from the problem-solving activities in the discovery process. Only after these are determined can a writer effectively decide the mode of writing most appropriate for the desired purpose. This was true in the previous examples where, had I not limited the focus of the topic, the chance that the strongest parts of the paper would have been more fully developed might have been greater. In other words, discovery and purpose work together: discovery leads a writer to deciding what aim is in mind, and this intention is implemented by deciding the appropriateness of a given mode (persuasive, expository, etc.) for conveying that intent.

Assigned topics do not help students assess the purpose--intention--needed because this part of the discovery process has been skipped. Failing to adequately focus on this early step in writing weakens or defeats a student's attempt at discerning the course of a piece of writing. Because intention determines the other factors in writing (audience, mode, tone, etc.), a failure at this stage can trap a student in a limbo of unresolved and poorly conceived fragments of thought that lack cohesion. B. M. Glassner notes:

> ...it is genuine intention which students' writing most often lacks and to which instruction has most often failed to attend. Student writers most often attend to their instructor's purposes than their own. In their attempt to adapt their instructor's prescriptions for form, students fail to recognize the form inherent in the emergence of their own ideas: in fact, they rarely get that far. The very nature of assignments deprives them of the opportunity to examine their own ideas and experiences (my emphasis) so locked are they into reproducing someone else's (1979).

Another factor that comes into play here is the attention that needs to be given to the audience addressed by a piece of writing. Audience consideration is part of the problem-solving nature of discovery and is related to purpose, interest, and all the other aspects of the writing process. Eleanor Hoffman and

John Schifsky point out that this also gives direction and clarity to writing, and the instructor must recognize "that the writer (student writer, any writer) writes to a particular audience in response to a wide variety of stimuli and for a number of different purposes" (1977). In my composition classroom the only texts are student writings that are used for small-group and whole-class discussions, and this peer influence has a strong effect on student perceptions. Besides providing a ready-made audience, peer presence tempers the interests and experiences that are presented in a paper. Though the demographics of my classes are diverse, the students also share many things in common: completing college, facing the job market, being of roughly the same age, etc. These similarities provide a backdrop and sense of identity that encourages students to share the ideas, perceptions, etc. from their experiential backgrounds. This peer influence should be used for both its similarities and contrasts to reinforce the fact that each student has a valid interpretation of the world and a vision of reality that can be shared through writing.

Careful attention to audience presence in class--the fact that papers will be read by a real reader besides the teacher--adds legitimacy to a paper, decreases the busywork/exercise feeling of the writing, and can prevent papers that are addressed to some undefined "they." Selection and specification of an audience, along with an awareness of the other factors in the process of discovery expands problem-solving into something more accurately described as problem-finding: creating, formulating, and conceiving new problematic situations. This is both the creation of new ways to see the world, and a unique, individualistic experience that is only hampered by the restrictions of assigned topics that proscribe these end-products of discovery.

Assigning a topic like "Why I am Majoring In ___" puts students in a position where discovery, intention, and audience are difficult to ascertain. In fact, from the students' point of view there is little reason to concentrate on these things for the assignment has already taken care of much of this. Discovery has been circumvented for students need only fill in the provided topic. Intention has been given in the form of having to respond to another exercise. Audience effect is diluted because the instructor and the rest of the class all know ahead of time what will be written on (and the other students will be writing nearly identical papers), and this diminishes the incentive to communicate--share--a part of oneself with others.

Most of the preceeding discussion of the negative effects that assigned topics have on student writing actually adds up to one, overriding indictment of the contrived atmosphere created when students write for reasons other than their own. The next consideration then:

If effective writing grows out of a real context rather than an artificial environment...

Students are put at a disadvantage when having to write on assigned topics. The class becomes an arena for attending to problems with grammar and mechanics rather than a place for encouraging students to write with a personal investment. Assigned topics compel students to write on subjects that they may not find compelling. The reasons for writing are less genuine and the entire writing process is undercut because of an emphasis on artificial processes for an artificial context. I'll be the first to admit that there is no way to completely rid artificiality from the classroom. As teachers, we are in the position of having to evaluate writing and translate this into grades. But, artificiality can be reduced and the first step toward this is to view our students as writers rather than pupils. The next step is to examine what is condusive to good writing.

Two concerns are central to good writing: quantity and time. Too often we feel that we are not doing our jobs as teachers if we don't keep students busy writing a great many assignments. But keeping students busy results in giving them busy-work, and the demands of x-number of papers leads to a concern with products rather than processes. Also, it is not unusual for us to expect (demand?) that students complete these writings in a specified time period. We often push our students through a frenzied writing course that is more gymnastic than effective. Yet, all evaluations of what makes a good writer (professional and/or student) indicate that adequate time is vital. Good writing takes time and often more time than we are comfortable in allowing. Time is needed to discover what to write on, what way to approach a topic, and how to discern the most effective way to frame ideas and feelings in writing.

Quality is what is hoped for, the result of a careful consideration for quantity and time. Less concern with quantity during a term gives the instructor more time for direct contact with students at each phase of the writing process. Requiring the production of fewer finished pieces can give students more time to explore topics they find interesting and to do so with more than a surface treatment. Combined with student generated topics, attention to these factors facilitates a wider, more interesting range of written discourse in a class--a range far broader than what could be produced with assigned topics. Many times my students have been captivated, alarmed, or touched by an incident in the national media, a local event or issue, or something out of one of their other classes. Having the freedom and time afforded by topic choice, they can explore these things while still current and, through writing, put these into a perspective and convey their opinions and feelings on paper. Sometimes these ideas come from a student whose views are so abrasive, unique, or clever that others in the class are stirred into replying in writing. This allows a particular event or issue to be probed in more depth, and from a wider variety of viewpoints, than would be possible with topics assigned by me that were to be written on at predesignated dates. Audience presence becomes more tangible and the reduction of artificiality leads to an atmosphere where a paper has a life of its own.

Any reduction in the falsity of the writing situation helps to bring a corresponding reduction in the level of anxiety that many students feel about writing. When students write only for purposes of evaluation, each paper becomes a test, a place to evaluate performance. Writing is already an ominous enough task for most students, and this dread must be reduced as much as possible. Barbara King's study of the attitudes that secondary and college students have toward writing found a strong preference for personal choice in topics in order for students to explore matters of interest to them. This self-exploratory orientation, where students write to express their feelings on subjects chosen by them, led to writing that involved far less anxiety than assigned topics. In King's words: "By permitting students to select their own writing topics, they may take more interest in their assignments and develop more positive attitudes toward writing" (1979).

Okay, so all this stuff sounds nice and helpful, but how does one incorporate these things into the structure of a writing class?

If we accept the idea that student generated topics are useful...

I have based my advocation of the use of student generated assignment topics on my early experiences as an instructor of composition. I admit that I am just a whipper-snapper as far as my teaching experience goes, but because of the underlying aspects of the writing process--the significance and diversity of student interests, the influence of audience, the centrality of the discovery process, etc.--serious attention by all writing teachers at any level should be given to the value of using topics chosen by students.

It is time to put my pen where my mouth is, so to speak. How have I used student selected topics and how well did it work? As I said, during my first term I used narrowly structured assignments because I had little else to go on and was anxious about having to begin teaching on such short notice. (Another novice described the situation as being parachuted into the class as literacy commandos.) My students expected this limited focus, as I had when in their place, and dutifully went about the job of cranking out the required work. I don't mean to imply that all of the papers were disasters, for most of the class showed a great deal of patience and creativity in adjusting their ideas and feelings to the framework set up. But something was missing--some authentic presence of depth and personality in the feel of the papers no matter how hard I tried to present and explain each assignment.

I began to experiment. I explained the approach to be taken in an assignment in general terms, and had the class work in small groups to generate lists of possible topics. The first time that I tried this was with an assignment called "Practical Writing." When I originally drew up the syllabus I had no clear idea what I meant by this--it just sounded like a good thing to have in a writing class. But, as I pondered paper topics, it dawned on me that this would be a good place to open up the scope of the assignments. It would be a chance to use an assignment that must, if it was to be "practical" for a student, be designed to meet the needs of each writer. With this in mind, I defined practical writing by two general criteria: First, this writing must have either some use or purpose beyond the confines of the class, or something outside the class can be investigated or experienced and brought into the class through the paper. Second, the appropriate length of the paper is determined by the topic itself rather than adhering to any arbitrary length.

At first, students were confused by the freedom of choice because they were used to being told exactly what to do. But their initial uneasiness soon lessened and they came up with topics that were as practical, and more varied, than the ones I could have thought up. This response was better than I had hoped. Some examples:

--A realistic and detailed circular for an imaginary apartment complex. The student explained that she and her sister were going to work as apartment managers during the summer and she wanted practice putting news items and policy statements together.

--A newsletter written by a student who worked at a day-care center. She was looking for a way to interest and inform parents about activities and used this assignment for this.

--An evaluation form designed by a student involved with a Brownie unit. Done in response to national headquarters which threatened to withdraw support from local chapters that didn't have evidence that the girls were taking an active role in planning activities.

--Several letters of complaint and grievance to corporations, politicians, and various MSU administrative offices.

--Quite a few resumes and cover letters. Students researched necessary form and content on their own.

The enthusiastic response to this approach led me to use it for the rest of the term. Papers were much livelier and more competently handled than those from the first half of the course. I felt that I was on the verge of some great, new frontier in my teaching--in a way I was, but I carried it too far the next term. Rather than provide any definite direction, I told my students that they were to do six papers, and these could be written on anything they chose to write on. This was met with enthusiastic approval at first, but after the first two assignments the students' ardor began to wane. I'm not exactly sure why this happened, but I suspect that a course pattern like this requires more orchestration and mothering than I was able to provide at the time.

My method now is a combination of the two approaches. I allow students to choose their own topics yet give a general structure for the course. To do this I have adopted the sequencing ideas of the experiential (inner world to outer world) approach, described by Stephen Tchudi (1980), to give structural guidelines for assignments. This involves focusing on the students' "inner worlds" in the first paper where they write from or about a personal perspective--the student is at the center of the paper. The goal is for the writer to develop a sense of "voice" and the sharing of some aspect of themselves helps to break the ice for more personal, candid involvement as students edit and discuss papers in class. Subsequent papers are to be progressively more objective in subject matter, and each writing is meant to build off of, and incorporate the ideas of, all previous writing. This gives students a variety of styles and purposes to practice with, and still allows them to choose their own topics. I give only general guidelines for each paper by discussing the emphasis each writing is to have. I also explain the overall pattern (inner to outer focus) that papers will take during the term--but I don't assign topics to be written on. This makes students feel that the class has a concrete footing but doesn't inhibit them in the choice of subject matter.

The number of "major" writings is also less and scheduling works out so that a draft or final draft is done every other Friday. But the real gems to come out of this term are the one page "commentaries," written for alternate Fridays. I didn't expect the relish my students would take with these. They actually look forward to them and often write more than one page--sometimes single spaced. Topics are totally open and the students are curious about, and eager to read, what each has written. Colorful vignettes, fables, poems, stream of consciousness, and editorials are just a few examples of the writings that appear. Besides being enjoyable, they also give students solid, yet painless, practice for the longer papers.

I realize that I haven't entirely practiced what I preach in this paper. There is a fine line between providing an approach to a paper with free topic choice, and insinuating what topics are appropriate for a given approach. Still being new at this game makes me uncomfortable with total freedom in a writing course, and the structure I now use is the most successful attempt I've yet made at combining structure with freedom. But, I can't help but feel that giving students as much choice as possible in selecting a topic enhances the vital elements of the writing process. Writing teachers must be conscious of the limitations imposed on students when they are forced to write on topics like "My Most Significant Experience" or "My Summer Vacation." It's not that these topics are inherently evil; and if students want to write on these subjects they should be allowed to do so. But as writing instructors, we must understand that these topics are only a small sample of a vast number of possibilities--possibilities whose relevence is best gauged by students themselves.

Sources Cited

Flower, Linda and John Hayes. "The Cognition of Discovery: Defining a Rhetorical Problem," *CCC*, (Feb. 1980), pgs. 21-32.

Glassner, B. M. *What Empirical Research Reveal About Topics and Writing Processes*. Paper presented at NCTE Convention, Nov. 1979, ED 181 453.

Hoffman, Eleanor and John Schifsky. "Designing Writing Assignments," *EJ*, (1977), pgs. 41-45.

King, Barbara. *Measuring Attitudes Toward Writing: The King Construct Scale*. Paper at Conference on College Composition and Communication, April 1979, ED 172 258.

Moffett, James. *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968.

Murray, Donald. "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery." in C. R. Cooper and L. Odell (eds.), *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1978.

Tchudi (Judy), Stephen. "The Experiential Approach." In *Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition*, pgs. 37-51. Edited by Timothy R. Donovan and Ben W. McClelland. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1980.

The In-Class Journal: Variety, Justification, Direction

Philip McKinney
Michigan State University

R. E. Young, in his article "Paradigms and Problems," writes that "we lack detailed accounts of pedagogical devices associated with theories of invention, such as...the journal" (pg. 29). I will try to supply some information on journal writing by showing the various ways they are used, and I will attempt to justify the claims of those writers who praise the use of journals by citing theoretical models that might support them. This will help me develop a theoretical base and a practical approach in my own teaching, and I hope it will be informative and stimulating to my colleagues.

VARIETY

Journals can be used in many ways, both in the classroom and out. They can be used to stimulate personal growth or for academic purposes, (of course, these are not necessarily distinct). Journals can be used effectively in any classroom in *any* discipline, and they may be especially useful in writing classes. (I list all the resources I encountered in an appendix).

Personal Growth: The prominent name here is Ira Progoff. He developed his approach to journal writing as a practicing clinical psychologist, finding that patients were helped by keeping personal journals. He went on to develop a sophisticated and structured system which is detailed in *At A Journal Workshop*, 1975, and *The Practice of Process Meditation*, 1980. His method has been taught in workshops across the country and includes meditation and the use of a journal with several sections: the sisteen sections interact with each other and reflect the person's whole psyche, and so the approach hopes to be integrative. Many of the exercises done in these sections can be useful in a writing class; I used some of them this term with my students and we had good results.

George Simons' *Keeping Your Personal Journal* is also a helpful book; it lists several good exercises and has an extensive section in the back, "Further Resources For Journal Keeping," where he describes several other sources.

Values Clarification: Simons explains that "The Values Clarification Movement is a humanistic trend in education which seeks to support the student's personal growth in values by accentuating the worth and capability of the learner" (p. 140). At the recent Bright Ideas Conference, Prof. Molter described her approach in which she uses exercises (from Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies For Teachers and Students by Simon, Howe and Kirschenbaum) as the basis for class interaction and gathering personal material from which to write.

Both personal journals and values clarification journals can be useful in a writing class, as we have seen. More important for our purposes are academic journals.

Academic Journals: M. L. Cutter in her article outlined a highly structured approach to journal writing at the elementary level. Her students write for ten minutes each day on anything they choose. She uses it as a place to practice what is being taught in class (cursive writing, capitals, spelling words, grammar, etc.; perhaps some of the topics are from "social studies" or "Michigan history" or some other unit). She writes her own journal part of the time as her students write. They may keep their writing private, but there is also opportunity for them to read aloud. She finds that reading over their shoulder and the feedback given then eventually substitutes for turning them in (1979).

Linda W. Wagner recommends a similar approach to secondary teachers. She had her writing class respond daily in personal journals to readings, and they write six of seven responses as journal entries with one more formal exercise or essay. The journal writing serves the purpose of daily writing practice which she is not required to grade closely, although she reads their entries (1968).

In two other articles journal writing is recommended to help students penetrate the texts of Shakespeare. J. G. Greene has his high school class reduce the action of each scene of the plays they read to one complete sentence. He calls these collected exercises a "creative notebook," since students are encouraged to write their own style (using contemporary slang and current teen jargon), or to imitate the King James Version of the Bible; they may use the plain style if they wish, but few do (1972). In a college Shakespeare class, J. R. Nicholl describes the use of a highly structured "in-class journal" to respond to the literature. He uses mostly structured assignments, some free writing, and describes a complex grading system; he uses them at the end of each class period (1979).

Another college-level instructor recommends journals for students in all classes. Finding marginalia in assigned reading texts in the library, M. D. Platt realizes readers need to respond to texts. He assigns journals in his classes where he asks students to carry their inquiry forward by responding to the readings--they give thoughts about the text or ask questions from it, they explore, inquire, question, or "wander aimfully." He finds that by composing before class, students are better prepared. He gets an essay from each student based on something in his journal, and the knowledge that some of it will be published gives the journal writing more significance (1975/76).

Toby Fulwiler describes a much more fully developed program of interdisciplinary journal writing. Teaching English at Michigan Tech, Fulwiler also leads workshops there to encourage teachers in all disciplines to use more writing in their classes. Besides sessions on such things as invention, rewriting, editing and evaluation, the workshops teach journal writing which is either structured or "free-writing" to generate topics for short papers.

Fulwiler gives examples of applications made by professors of history, geography, political science, music, drama, and the technical fields of engineering and science, besides describing how he uses the journal in literature courses. There, students attempt definitions of new material, (redefining it more clearly later); they do homework exercises to prepare for the next class; they write on a line or passage they don't understand, thereby writing themselves toward an understanding. All these examples from the writing workshops he calls "pedagogical catalysts" (1980).

T. C. Buell emphasizes journal writing as a way to get students to "write enough," making it a major part of their work. This seems appropriate for both high school and college age writing classes (or is perhaps a rationale for journal writing at all levels). Because the teacher cannot assign enough (or read enough of what could be assigned) to keep his students writing as much as is necessary to learn well, he recommends journal writing so that "the student can become accustomed to doing what he has rarely done, probably never done, and that is writing enough to become used to writing so that he begins to write with less self-consciousness and with increasing confidence, even skill" (1969).

Academic journals can be used in composition classes as well as the interdisciplinary approaches above. Journal writing is perhaps most strongly associated with the "prewriting school" of rhetorical invention; Young's statement with which we opened refers to this usage. D. Gordon Rohman is generally credited with originating several of the distinctive features of this method.

Rohman's ideas are outlined in his 1965 article "Pre-Writing: The Stage of Discovery in the Writing Process," and given in fuller form in the report he co-authored for the US Office of Education in 1964. He defines pre-writing as "the stage of discovery in the writing process when a person assimilates his 'subject' to himself" (p. 106). His project attempts to isolate the principle of this assimilation and design a course in which a student can imitate that process. The process of imitation is accomplished three ways: by journal writing, meditation, and the use of analogy. Journals are used here to enable a person to discover him or herself. If the transformation/assimilation he describes (more below on this) is personal (as it must be), and if one discovers in good writing things that are also in the subject, then discovering the self in the journal can be an aid to and a starting place for that process to unfold. They were attempting to put writers in touch with their own creative powers.

The use of academic journals produces a variety of results. Cutter finds that compared to previous years, "sentences are more varied. There is more of an attempt to observe basic writing skills. They are attempting longer writing of a greater variety. There is not as much reluctance to write...Is it working? Well enough so that I will continue" (p. 71). (And I found an article by a harried junior high teacher who used journal writing to keep his students occupied while he took role and completed absence slips; he found it helped him get control of the class and gave him a ten minute break. No comment at all about the writing possibilities.)

Several articles mentioned that students influence teachers with their journals. They gain a close knowledge of just how students write, and they understand them better as people (since they are reading personal responses). Teachers who write journals along with their students and share from their entries would probably contribute even more to this kind of understanding.

Advantages for students include daily practice which facilitates the learning of writing but also makes writing easier in all classes. They have a casebook of ideas which can be drawn upon for larger papers, and they have a record of their new awareness of themselves and their world. Students generally come to value this writing and believe in it. They get personally involved with their subjects and their writing and with the writing of others.

Where journal writing is used in a literature class (or any other field), an additional set of advantages emerges. Students are forced to keep up with assignments if they are required to prepare for class discussion in journal writing (which can then be graded). They can explore topics not covered in class, and they gain greater depth of thought as they grapple with subjects in their own writing. Students in the "write it the night before" syndrome get caught in the habitual writing and find it less painful; their anxiety about writing diminishes.

Buell says that journal writing helps students develop a critical sense which encourages self-learning and minimizes the threatening effect of teacher intervention. J. G. Green's results are a good example. Where students reduce each scene of a play to one sentence, they must manipulate the syntax of their own sentences (which is itself good practice), and the scene must be thoroughly understood to be able to capture its essence. By focusing on style (as they attempt to transform the style into their own language), it gives the exercise validity beyond mere plot and action.

Fulwiler discusses various ways to grade journals, including merely counting pages or noting whether or not students have been writing. He cautions against not reading journals for several reasons. Teachers cannot give input if journals are not read, nor do students believe the writing is important. Students realize no grade can be given (other than credit or no credit). And Fulwiler reminds us, like many of the other authors cited here, that teachers cannot learn from students if they do not read from their personal writing. (He has students include a separate "private" section to solve the privacy issue.)

In addition to these reports of the effectiveness of journal writing, I would like to add my own. Because of the meaningfulness of my own personal journal writing, I hoped to use it in my own classroom, but I found at first I didn't know how to teach it. But as I worked through the materials for this paper, I decided to start my class on journals at mid-term. When we began to write journal entries in class, several "strong silent types" or less skillful writers still had not gotten "turned on" in a piece of their work, and probably never would have.

As it turned out, all but one of them got hooked by the journal work, discovered some new territory, or otherwise began to do their work with new enthusiasm. In a survey at the end of the term many of them admitted their initial skepticism with this new mode and their pleasant surprise at discovering themselves in new ways, and several found topics for their last two essays, (both of which are optional topics); two attempted poetry (one of whom was a poor writer at the beginning), and one wrote science fiction. There were some thoroughly engaging personal experience papers which spun off journal writing. I used several exercises from Progoff's book, and encouraged them to record what they could of their dreams. (Over two terms, I found generally that those with "weak imaginations" could remember their dreams more easily, and when they saw that those more interesting writers with more "vivid imaginations" had trouble recording their dreams, they were not as discouraged. Journal writing, including this recording of dreams, drew them in).

JUSTIFICATION

As a means of developing a theoretical model on which to base my own teaching and use of journal writing in the classroom, I will draw on some of the theory which I have encountered and on Rohman's article on pre-writing. I give these as possible explanations for the efficacy of journal writing, and emphasize that while journals can be used in just about anyone's classroom, in any model, I will be working toward clarifying my own position.

We have seen that journals can be used for personal growth (with some application in writing classes), values clarification (also some use) and in a wide variety of academic applications, many of which are useful to writing courses. And in the "prewriting school," journal writing was developed extensively as a tool to aid invention. (In "A Critical Survey of Resources for Teaching Rhetorical Invention," Harrington et al. identify many of the authors who followed Rohman's lead in this approach to writing.) It remains to be seen what theoretical explanations can be made for their effectiveness.

Journal writing finds support in the testimony of several kinds of instructors, as we have seen. No matter how one teaches composition, journal writing can be a useful and powerful tool because it works at a personal primary level of assimilation and discovery. We can find evidence for this in several of the models we have studied.

Several of the writers (Progoff and Rohman, most notably) recommend a form of meditation in conjunction with journal writing. One enters this relaxed state of consciousness to allow elements of the unconscious to come to the surface of awareness, and as these are perceived and recorded the writer realizes personal imagery and fantasy, parts of the personal creative power; it is also a way of making knowledge concrete and personal. I suppose this can be justified by saying that if we want our students to put their hearts and souls into their writing, we must help them get in touch with those components of their experience.

Journal writing and other kinds of pre-writing are in part ways of discovering meaningful and original things to write about, and many writers stress the importance of this part of the writing process. Rohman emphasizes that the goal of education should be to put students in touch with the powers of creative discovery within them, and he says a teacher can use a person's desire to actualize himself effectively in a writing class. His goal was to make the method of imitating this actualization available to his students. (Meditation for Rohman was both a heuristic for discovery and an organizing principle for subsequent writing.) He attempts to give "rhetoric of the mind" as a necessary preliminary to any rhetoric of the word, since to write well one must have discovered something to say.

James Britton emphasizes the primary quality of what he calls expressive writing and its effectiveness for exploration and discovery. He says that "as writers improve in their ability to meet the demands" of the two possible kinds of tasks, "they will internalize two distinct sets of rules of use: from the matrix of expressive writing, they will acquire competence in both transactional and poetic modes of writing" (1978). And Toby Fulwiler begins his article by citing Britton, who insists "that expressive writing is both the matrix from which other forms of writing take shape and the language closest to thought. Expressive writing 'may be at any stage the kind of writing best adopted to exploration and discovery. It is the language that externalizes our first struggles in tackling a problem or coming to grips with an experience.'"

Dowst, in his article "The Epistemic Approach," also emphasizes language use as a means of discovery. "I now see writing...as above all a means of knowing and a means of coming-to-know? (1980). And Murray in his article "Internal Revision," says "writers much of the time don't know what they are going to write or even possibly what they have written. Writers use language as a tool of exploration to see beyond what they know" (1978).

In addition to discovery, journal writing may facilitate the assimilation and transformation of experience, another element of the composition process. In Rohman's model, thinking precedes writing and is an active process, "essentially the imposition of pattern upon experience" (p. 106). This pattern has two levels: the fundamental organization of a subject and the individual pattern of meaning which a writer gives to that subject. He thinks of writing as combinations of words whose meaning is in the pattern of combinations: the writer looks for the arrangement that will mutually fit the self and the subject to each other so that it is assimilated.

He describes this assimilation as the process of making an external event a personal experience, which in writing takes the form of searching for the right words which will set this transformation in motion. Finding them is the "characteristic combinatorial pattern," the mutual assimilation of subject and self, that characterizes pre-writing.

One way of personally experiencing this transformation in Rohman's model is meditation, while the other is the use of analogy. Here a writer experiments with looking at something as if it were something else. Rohman concludes that writing grounded in these personal transformations should be the basic experience for all writers.

The process we have been describing is language-based. (Meditation may not involve language, but it does not necessarily exclude it.) Professor Judy, in "The Experiential Approach," describes the internalization of experience as mutually interdependent among perceptions and thinking, language, and experience, all of which language synthesizes (1980).

And Dowst's model describes a similar alignment of writer, language, and reality. He says that "at no place in the entire spectrum of knowing...do we know anything purely, objectively, immediately (p. 73). At every level of cognitive activity what we know is bound up with how we use language." His assumption is that writing modifies the writer as it shapes his reality. "By seriously experimenting in manipulating language (on a page, for instance), one experiments in knowing, in understanding the world in different ways" (p. 69). (This last experimentation is like Rohman's use of analogy.) What seems important to journal writing here is the reciprocal knowing of self and world mediated by language, writing as a means of discovery and assimilation.

In addition to saying that this process of assimilation is language based, we could also describe the assimilation as "integrative" for the writer. (Rohman insists several times in his article on the separation of thinking and writing in a relationship of prior cause and subsequent effect, and this seems highly artificial when compared to other authors.)

In Janet Emig's article "Writing as a Mode of Learning," she notes the three ways we "represent and deal with actuality" posited by Bruner, the enactive, iconic, and symbolic, and then says that "what is striking about writing as a process is that, by its very nature, all these ways of dealing with actuality are simultaneously or almost simultaneously deployed." This idea of "writing as integrative activity" reinforces Dowst's idea of composing one's world by writing: "while one in effect composes his or her world by engaging in any sort of language-using, it is by means of writing that one stands to learn the most, for writing is that form of language-using that is slowest, most deliberate, most accessible, most conveniently manipulable, and most permanent" (p. 69).

This brings us to another aspect of the writing process which Janet Emig describes in some detail. The feedback which one gets by reading what has been written powerfully reinforces the self- and world-knowledge presented to the writer in that text. She calls writing "primary technology" and says "because writing is often our representation of the world made visible, embodying both process and product, writing is...a form and source of learning..." She emphasizes the reinforcement writing enables: "writing through its inherent re-inforcing cycle involving hand, eye, and brain marks a uniquely powerful multi-representational mode for learning" (p. 71-73). She notes the slowness of writing which allows one to move among past, present, and future, making meaning from the connections in experience. In the slow process of writing, one can be aware of the growth of the writing, the world, and the self all at once. Here again we see the close relationship between word, thought, and knowledge, and sense a kind of microcosmic participation of the world and one's life in one's writing (and vice versa).

Part of the journal's effectiveness as a tool for discovery and growth as well as for learning writing is the combination of personal involvement and interest at the expressive or primal level of composing one's world. Consider the effect on the writer of this feedback when he or she knows that the writing's subject is the self and the world and their relationship. Murray writes that "writing is a significant kind of thinking in which the symbols of language assume a purpose of their own and instruct the writer during the composing process." One's own language instructs one about the interrelationship of elements in one's life in one's personal symbology. And continue with Emig a bit more: "writing is epigenetic ['growing in layers," perhaps, or "growth of an entity by the action of the environment on its surface"] with the complex evolutionary development of thought steadily and graphically visible and available throughout as a record of the journey, from jottings and notes to full discursive formulations." Here we see how powerful feedback and the evolution of form and meaning can be to a writer.

The combination of these elements of the writing process, then, as described by various writers, may contribute to the effectiveness of journal writing as a tool for teaching composition. Meditation, discovery, assimilation and transformation, integration, and feedback, working at this very basic level of personally expressive journal writing, can have a unique and powerful value as a way of knowing oneself and one's world, of composing and ordering them, and it can lead to fuller and more complete public communication about that world. Journal writing appears to be a tool that can lead writers toward making these discoveries and finding the materials with which to build their lives: not the impersonal data of mere observation, but the personally transforming experience of participating in and even creating a world full of meaning.

DIRECTIONS

Jonathan Swift, in his keynote address at a recent MCTE conference, mentioned several encouraging developments in teaching composition: he cited use of the process model of instruction, the inclusion of multi-cultural dimensions, interdisciplinary approaches and others. He recalled polls taken among successful businessmen and national leaders which repeatedly name English and communication skills as the most important courses taken in college training. He also reminded his listeners that our language use and writing forms the bond and common ground among all disciplines. He was proposing a global approach to education in which the total design of learning and its interrelationships are taught. This would be holistic, experience-oriented, and compatible with the spherical (rather than linear or compartmentalized) growth patterns that individuals experience.

He suggested that our survival depends on a change in this direction, a change in consciousness which could be brought about in part by teachers using this global approach. (R. Buckminster Fuller had spoken on our campus a few weeks before; he has been advocating engineering concepts with a similar philosophical base for years. The resonance between these two different speeches was unmistakeable and compelling. It seemed to me that Swift was making practical and achievable what Fuller has been dreaming about for years.) Swift recommended that we treat skills and knowledge holistically and not fragmentally, that the schools expand into the community, and that we offer learning outside classrooms.

We occasionally hear such stirring recommendations and then return to the reality of our departments and school systems where they seem impossible to achieve. But consider Fulwiler's article: on a regular basis, at an engineering school in a remote part of the country, a humanities department serves members of the university's faculty by giving interdisciplinary workshops in which skeptical professors are convinced to try journal writing in a wide variety of disciplines. Fulwiler quotes many reports of successful results with students (and changed attitudes among entrenched instructors, no mean feat in itself). Here is an interdisciplinary approach which operates by offering help with writing skills "across the disciplines."

Or consider what might have happened if Johnny had grown up in a school system in which journal writing was used in elementary and middle school, and then in high school he was again asked to keep a journal in several classes. He may have been satisfied with his good education and practical skills, or, when Johnny attended a community college or a university, he again kept a personal journal in freshman composition. There he made discoveries about himself and his values and got a lot of writing practice to boot. He found he could write papers in other classes with relative ease and skill; this was not unusual, however, since many others from his old school system were also studying at the same college. He might have had an instructor like M. D. Platt who encouraged the use of journals in _all_ classes, and, from long familiarity with the approach, he might have taken his advice. Johnny (and the authors of numerous pessimistic articles) might not only have found that he could write and write well, but that he was actively involved in getting a real education for himself. In fact I'm sure that in these ideal circumstances, he would have found this out long before.

For myself, I will keep writing my own journals, indexing ideas there and developing those which seem promising. And I will continue to use the in-class journal when next I teach. I hope my fellow instructors will be encouraged from this article to read around and look for themselves at some of the articles and books I have cited and to work out a way to use journals in their instruction. Journals don't work for everyone, but the approach is compatible with almost any teaching strategy at any level, and has been shown to be effective among many disciplines. Give it a try--journal writing may be just what your Johnnies and Janes need.

APPENDIX

for Personal Growth

Baldwin, Christina. _One to One: Self Understanding through Journal Writing_. Available through Henry Morrison, Inc., 58 West 10th Street, New York, N.Y. 10011.

Hughes, Milt. _Spiritual Journey Notebook_. Available through National Student Ministries, 129 Ninth Ave. North, Nashville, Tenn. 37234.

Progoff, Ira. _At a Journal Workshop: The Basic Text and Guide for Using the Intensive Journal_. New York, N.Y.: Dialogue House Library, 1975.

Rainer, Tristine. _The New Diary! How To Use a Journal for Self-Guidance and Expanded Creativity_. New York, N.Y.: St. Martin's Press.

Simons, George. _Keeping Your Personal Journal_. New York, N.Y.: Paulist Press, 1978.

for Values Clarification

Hawley, Robert and Isabel Hawley. _Human Values in the Classroom: A Handbook for Teachers_.

----------. _Writing for the Fun of It: An Experience-Based Approach to Composition_. Amherst, Mass.: Education Research ASsociates Press, 1974.

for Academic Journals

Britton, James. "The Composing Processes and the Functions of Writing." In *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*. Eds. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell. Urbana: NCTE, 1978.

Buell, Thomas, C. "Notes on Keeping a Journal." *CCC* 20 (1969), pg. 43.

Cooper, Charles R. and Lee Odell. *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1978.

Cutter, M. L. "*EJ* Workshop: Journal Writing is Only the Beginning." *EJ* 68 (Oct. 1979), pg. 68.

Dowst, Kenneth. "The Epistemic Approach: Writing, Knowing, and Learning." *In Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition*. Eds. Timothy R. Donovan & Ben W. McClelland. Urbana: NCTE, 1980.

Emig, Janet. "Writing as a Mode of Learning," *In The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*. Eds. Gary Tate and Edward Corbett. New York: Oxford, 1981

Fulwiler, Toby. "Journals Across the Disciplines." *EJ* 69 (Dec. 1980), pg. 14.

Greene, J. Gordon. "Motivating Students to Study Shakespeare: A Creative Notebook Approach." *EJ* 61 (May 1972), pg. 504.

Harrington, and others. "A Critical Survey of Resources for Teaching Rhetorical Invention." *In The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*. Eds. Gary Tate & Edward Corbett. New York: Oxford, 1981

Judy, Stephen. "The Experiential Spproach: Inner Worlds to Outer Worlds." *In Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition*. Eds. Timothy R. Donovan and Lee Odell. Urbana: NCTE, 1980.

Murray, Donald. "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery." In *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*. Eds. Timothy R. Donovan and Lee Odell. Urbana: NCTE, 1978.

Nicholl, James R. "The In-Class Journal." *CCC* 30 (1979), pg. 305.

Platt, Michael D. "Writing Journals in Courses." *CE* 37 (1975/76), pg. 408.

Rohman, D. Gordon. "Pre-Writing: The Stage of Discovery in the Writing Process." *CCC* 16 (May 1965), pg. 106.

Wagner, Linda W. "Practice Without Pain: The In-Class Journal." *EJ* 57 (1968), pg. 221

Young, Richard E. "Paradigms and Problems." In *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*. Eds. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell. Urbana: NCTE, 1978.

Composing a Reality

Diana Pingatore
Michigan State University

As a composition teacher, I often feel like the domestic in the English Department. While my more esteemed colleagues engage in esoteric conversations with students about the poetics of language, narrative possibilities, and other textual subtleties, I am relegated to the more onerous tasks of nagging my students to polish tarnished adjectives, iron out awkward prepositions, or to repair split infinitives. Or so it seems on those days when the drudgery of teaching basic writing skills overshadows the small and often private satisfactions of a job well done.

Part of the problem is that writing, and therefore, the teaching of it, is like housework: it is never done. There is always a corner of some paragraph to be dusted, some cobweb of thought to be untangled, some ill-chosen phrase to be trashed. To add to the frustration, those who evaluate the end result, be it an essay or an attic, inevitably possess an uncanny eye for the chore left unfinished or shabbily completed. It is no small wonder then that composition teachers and their students grow weary of the task set before them. They are not likely to be praised for the successes realized, but are certain to be reprimanded for the failures encountered.

As the criticisms are many and the praises are few, it is imperative that teachers of composition believe strongly in the value of what they do in the writing classroom and that they recognize the indispensable contribution they make to the educational process. Otherwise, there is a real danger that composition teachers themselves will come to view their role as that of the domestic in the academic household. To do so is to subscribe to a system of values that denigrates the teachers and the subject they teach. To avoid such an untenable position, composition teachers need to clarify for themselves, for their colleagues, and for their students, the nature and value of their task in the academic community.

Such is the purpose of this paper. As a teacher of composition, I shall attempt to determine precisely what I believe about writing and the teaching of it. To accomplish this task, I shall rely primarily on my experience as a writer and as a teacher of writing. I shall try to assess the strategies I now use in the classroom, determine their effectiveness, and evaluate how those strategies support or undermine my experience with the writing process.

It might be said that it is a housewifely impulse that prompts this investigation. It certainly derives from a sense of dissonance I experience in the writing classroom. I feel at odds with the situation, torn between what I perceive to be my obligations as a teacher and what I perceive my students need: to be writers. Many factors contribute to this confusion, but most are related to the expectations held about composition teachers. The students expect the teachers to teach them to write, the teachers expect to be able to teach students to write, and the wider academic community expects teachers and students to fulfill each other's expectations.

It seems to me that this is the beginning of the quandary. For I suspect that in the heart of all composition teachers lurks the fear that they cannot accomplish the expected: to teach students to write. The fear seems a real one, especially if one views teaching as one kind of activity and writing as quite another. Teaching usually presumes a subject matter to be taught, a subject matter that is finite in nature, and therefore amenable to mastery. Such assurance is rarely accorded the writing teacher. In fact the condition of security often seems contrary to the condition of writing, and thus to the teaching of it. Donald Murray emphasizes this situation when he notes that "in the writing process approach, the teacher and the student face the task of making meaning together" (1980). For Murray, the composition classroom is not a situation in which teachers should assume the command ordinarily expected of them. This idea can be very disconcerting for teachers who attempt to fulfill the expectations of the wider academic community. It can even lead to a schizophrenia of sorts, which is precisely the tendency I detect in my approach to the teaching of composition.

Even though my syllabus for a college level, sophomore writing workshop states that the emphasis in the course will be on the writing process, I find the majority of the class time is spent on what students will write, rather than how they should go about writing it. In other words, I emphasize the product over the process. In so doing, I teach one thing, but expect the students to do quite another. For instance, as I make assignments in the traditional rhetorical modes, much time is spent discussing the nature of narrative and expository writing. The compare/contrast assignment, a regular, provides a salient example. I elaborate on the possible strategies students can employ to produce an informative and enlightening essay. For the most part, I find students incorporate those strategies fairly well into their writing, but also find that most of the comparisons or contrasts they make would be better left unmade. This, despite my caution that they find a suitable topic. As a result, both my students and I are frustrated. But interesting enough, as they see me as a competent teacher and I see them as willing students, it is the writing task itself that becomes the scapegoat in the situation. Ultimately, that perception--that writing is an unrewarding task--undermines our combined efforts.

That is not to say that I, or my students, are entirely displeased with what occurs in my classroom. Some activities appear to be genuinely beneficial. As a way to obtain information about what students perceive occurs in my classroom, I designed a short questionnaire for them to respond to. In the questionnaire, I asked students to assess, based on class activities, what I considered priorities in writing. Some of the responses were encouraging. None of the students indicated that I placed undue stress on grammar or mechanics. Some noted I did provide assistance in these areas with handouts which were not discussed unless students requested I do so, while a few students bewailed the oversight. (The latter group indicated the most dissatisfaction with the class.) Organization and development of ideas emerged as the predominant concern in my instruction during the course, along with a concern that students feel they have something of importance to say and a reason for saying it in the best possible way. Some students cited the issue of audience as an important feature, which surprised me as I thought I have minimum attention to that aspect of writing.

The most successful activity noted was revision, especially those attempted immediately after a critiqueing session or conference. In this, my students and I are in complete agreement. The revision stage is the point at which the students and I begin to experience success in this task of making meaning; they, because revision demonstrates to them that they can improve their own writing, and I, because the revisions evidence that my suggestions (or their peers') have been helpful.

Other comments indicated that sample essays prompted students to think about topic choices and starting strategies. Some indicated that too much time was allotted for pre-writing strategies and not enough time was given to revisions. Students also suggested shorter and more frequent writing assignments would allow for more thorough revisions.

Beneath the surface of the students' comments, whether of a critical or an adulatory nature, I sense the impetus on their part to do more, not less, writing in a composition class. I am surprised, although I should not be. My own experience as a writer confirms their inclination to think more writing opportunities would enhance the writer's skill. Yet, frequent opportunities to write is precisely what I do not provide for my students in the classroom. Writing is an activity I expect them to engage in outside of the classroom; it is almost as if I considered classroom time too valuable to be spent on student writing.

That possibility shocks and disturbs me, both as a writer and a teacher. Yet it seems an accurate explanation for my reluctance to encourage writing as the primary activity of a composition class. As a teacher, I feel compelled to instruct; yet my students seem to indicate that the time spent on instruction is not as productive as that allotted to writing. Is it possible that my students sense what I, as teacher, deny by my actions: that the act of writing itself will indicate to them what they need to know as writers? And further, are their suggestions subtle hints that my instruction _is_ irrelevant until their own experience as writers reveals to them what form that instruction should take? If so, then their experience in the classroom has led them to sense what Murray claims: that "the writer looks within a piece of writing to determine the next step in the process."

Although students' request that they be allowed to do more writing and less listening to me in the classroom strikes me as legitimate, my desire to respond to that request is accompanied by an uneasiness. That uneasiness seems unrelated to change, as I have already incorporated many of the techniques recommended for the composition teacher who sees the role of editor as the useful one in the classroom. For instance, the class engages in pre-writing activities such as free-writing, peer evaluation of the writing produced, and revision of rough drafts.

The uneasiness seems to derive from the realization that the majority of my instruction emphasizes the end product of the writing process and that such an emphasis carries with it inherent assumptions about writing. For instance, I find myself guilty of the charge brought against teachers who emphasize form and structure to the point that "students come to see form as a mold into which content is somehow poured," as Paul Eschholz notes (1980), in his article about the use of prose models in the writing class. I find that perception disquieting as I think I believed it as a writer, as well as a teacher, at least until I began to teach writing. As a composition teacher, I have become acutely aware of the interrelation of form and content; and only then by the discomfort I experienced when I tried to make a case for a descriptive or explanatory paragraph in a prose model, only to feel the argument slip through my fingers. (Or in some cases, to have it wrenched from my grasp by a more discerning student!)

In retrospect I can see that my preference for traditional approaches to teaching composition evolves from some misconception on my part about writing and the teaching of it. That misconception was part and parcel of the indoctrination I eagerly absorbed in literature classes, without any reference to my own experience with writing. I wanted to write as good writers write and thus I imposed strategems on my inadequate ideas in order to pass them off as brilliant. Of course, the self-deception was not apparent to me then, just as it is not apparent to my students now who request the same indoctrination from me. This observation brings me to the source of uneasiness I experience in teaching in the traditional modes: it is another form of deception.

The thoughts, ideas, strategies I discuss, even the language I use, are not my own, but are borrowed from others, and even then, borrowed indiscriminately. Like my students who write to impress, so I as a teacher teach to impress. And when one wants to impress, it always seems a better idea to appropriate someone else's theories whose limitations or inconsistencies are not readily apparent, than to rely on one's own ideas which are known to be imperfect.

All this is not to suggest that traditional approaches are deceptive by nature or intent. Or even that teachers who employ them should be viewed suspiciously. It [illegible] only to point out that such approaches implicitly support an empirical view of the world. The traditional approaches to writing give credence to the assumption that the world can be known directly and that language serves as a vehicle for the transmission of such objective knowledge. Those approaches assume that a piece of writing can be broken down into its component parts which the student must then reconstruct and that such decomposition in no way injures the whole.

Recent philosophical and linguistic theories are calling into question such comfortable assumptions about the nature of reality and the part language plays in it. More and more theorists are beginning to ascribe to the converse idea, that it is language which gives shape to our reality and thus determines its nature, rather than merely serving as a neutral vehicle to reflect or interpret some objective reality outside ourselves.

Such interpretations have important consequences for composition teachers whose major concern is the manipulation of language to convey or perhaps I should say, to create meaning. If one imagines that meaning resides within language itself, and not in some external reality which language then attempts to imitate--as Sauserrian linguistics does--then teachers of composition must rethink their position in relation to language, and by extension, to writing.

If all this were merely a moot philosophical question, then composition teachers might easily dismiss such issues and leave the argument to the experts. But such is not the case. For implicit in one's view of reality is a prescription for dealing with other human beings. The empirical stance favors the possessor of the knowledge and then assumes the knowledge available to the searcher. Thus composition teachers can learn all there is to know about writing--that is, if they confine themselves to textbooks and do not try to understand their own writing process--and can therefore be in the position to dispense such knowledge to the less informed. The students, on the other hand, are perceived as empty vessels into which the knowledge is to be poured. If the transfer is less than successful, then either the students or the teachers can be held culpable; and indeed both are left with little defense unless the entire issue of knowledge and its acquisition and transmission is called into question.

In addition, if composition teachers view language as the shaping force of perception, that as Dowst maintains, language composes reality, then they must view the student's position in the writing situation quite differently than does the traditional teacher (1980). The latter position emphasizes the mutual elements in the process of composing their realities in language in the writing classroom. Thus one is not privileged over the other as is the case with the traditional approaches to writing. Instead the classroom situation provides both teachers and students with the opportunity to elicit assistance of each other in the composition of their respective realities by reading, responding and reacting to those compositions.

This approach, which Dowst designates as the "epistemic" approach, can help the composition teacher avoid the kind of deception I spoke of earlier and it also suggests a way out of the teacher/writer dilemma. If as teacher, I view the use of language as a way of composing reality, then I must claim a personal responsibility for the composition of my world and encourage my students to do likewise. No longer can I totally rely on the voice of authority--i.e. composition texts--to tell me what to teach in the classroom, for that would be to abdicate my responsibility as a composer of reality and thus fall into the deceptive pattern of presenting another's ideas as my own. That is not to say, however, that I cannot make optimal use of the experience of others who have preceeded me in the profession. I must only be certain that the resources I use are in fact useful, and that such views of writing do correspond to my actual experience with writing.

This will also necessitate more consideration on my part for what my personal beliefs and observations signify, both as a teacher and as a person. What and how I teach in the classroom would be determined by my experiences in the world; those experiences should form the basis for my perceptions about writing, about my relation to and responsibility for my students. And as I recognize those views as my own, they will always be amenable to change or modification. Somehow I am always less resistant to altering views that are legitimately my own, than I am to even modifying those that rightly belong to others. That is because the views that belong to others are often appropriated not because of their inherent validity, but because they carry with them a seal of approval; whereas my own views derive from actual experience and are therefore susceptible to change as my experience changes. A shift in view in the latter situation only indicates a reconstruction of experience; it is not accompanied by the fear of disapproval as would be the case is the viewpoint in question was not my own. The fear of being wrong (a predominant one in the classroom) is not the overriding concern of those who act on their own beliefs; it is the special domain of those who relinquish the responsibility for their thoughts and actions to another.

It strikes me that these principles are particularly appropriate to the writing situation as well. If a fairy godmother were to grant me one request in the composition classroom, my request would be that my students write honestly. Perhaps they would if I were more honest about what goes on in the classroom. And if I were, then the teacher/writer dilemma I have constructed would diminish considerably. I would not be forced to set myself up as the authority I know I am not. Instead I could then act as a resource for my students to tap as need be. Any experience I have gained as a writer who struggles to compose a reality would be at their disposal; then they would be in a position to elicit the kind of assistance most applicable to their situation, while I would derive satisfaction from providing that assistance and thus be gratified as a teacher.

If students were encouraged to see their language, and particularly their written language, as a composition of their reality, then perhaps they would strive to be more honest in their writing. Something essential would be at stake. The writing would no longer have to be what I suspect most of it is now--a hit and miss effort to appease the teacher. This approach almost forces students to situate their writing in their own reality as no other is provided for them. It also encourages students to move beyond the limitations of that reality to incorporate other views as a way to modify their original perceptions, if those do not prove satisfactory to them. And of what else does learning consist? But, always, the choice of what to be or not to be lies within the student's jurisdiction. The sphere of influence as a composer can be as large or as small as the student desires and is able to make it. Questions of audience can be addressed in this context. Students can consider the potential benefit of expanding their reality to include a wider readership. Revisions can then be seen as real choices and not merely corrections of failures, as is so often the case now.

But if I am to discard the well-worn theories advocated by the traditional rhetorical approaches, I must concern myself with a feasible replacement. One of the reasons for choosing to operate within the traditional structure in the past was that it provided an identifiable content for me as teacher to pass on to my students. It was essential to creating the illusion that writing was a subject matter that could be taught and that students only had to learn the methods involved to become good writers. But my actual experience in the classroom has proven this rationale to be untrue, although the realization of that has been blurred by the fact that some students do seem to learn by this approach. But what is it they learn? To become better writers or to become "good" students who excel at guessing what the teacher wants? Oddly enough, the fact that this response has occurred with a certain frequency reassures me that I am an effective teacher; students do learn in my classroom. My concern now is for what they learn and how.

Above all, I want my students to learn to be committed to their writing. I'd like them to come to understand that their writing is not merely one expression of their selves; it is a creation of those selves. And creation implies an active process in which they are agents of the action. That is a challenge that is both frightening and exhilerating; therefore creating an atmosphere in which students feel safe enough to explore this challenge is essential.

One way to mitigate the fearful aspect of this situation is to address the fears directly. Aside from any theraputic value derived from such discussion, there is the benefit of coming to understand the basis for the fears and with that the insight that a certain level of anxiety might actually be necessary for writing. To do this, potential writers need to talk about writing. And the teacher is on firm ground here as I know nothing writers like to do better than to talk about writing--except perhaps to write. A candid discussion of what to expect when one approaches the writing task would serve to demystify the process for the student and thus relieve some of the anxiety that often prohibits any attempt to write. The teacher's more extensive experience with writing and coping with the accompanying anxiety would prove invaluable to the novice writer. Students would have the opportunity to see themselves as part of a community of writers who share the same fear and frustrations. They would no longer have to castigate themselves for their inexperience, but could come to benefit from the experience of others.

Another way for students to benefit from the experience of others is to make prose models available in the classroom. Wide reading is beneficial to writing; personally I find some of my best writing is prompted by voracious reading. There is the benefit of introducing the students to realities other than their own, and some class time could be devoted to a discussion of those realities and what they signify. In addition, the students should become more proficient readers, thus enabling them to become more critical readers of their own writing. And last, but not least, is the pure pleasure of reading good writing. One comes to attend to language and its myriad possibilities in the reading process in a way that indirectly enhances the reading of one's own writing, if not the production of it. As a reader, the potential writer can discover the joy inherent in the skillful manipulation of language to create a reality.

Because of my desire to have students become committed to their writing, I do not make assignments in the rhetorical mode. To do so would encourage them to perceive writing as simply filling a formula. If, in fact, I believe the writing process is a way of composing one's reality, then I cannot predetermine the nature of the students' compositions. What and how they write would be a decision the students would make for themselves, though of course, it might be necessary to impose some requirements, such as a number of total pages, to meet the requirements of a given course. Students might also be encouraged to try a variety of modes for a given piece of writing to discover for themselves which perspective allows them to create the kind of reality they are most satisfied with.

Most of the class time would be spent in writing and talking about that writing. The students write on almost a daily basis, with ample opportunity for reworking individual pieces of writing, based on comments received in class discussion of those pieces. I encourage students to generate their own ideas for topics by sharing those ideas with each other and discussing the potential interest of each for a reader. Students can also suggest a variety of approaches to any topic choice as a way to provide alternatives for the writer.

For the time being, I retain the journal assignment as part of the class requirement. But I make the journal assignment a response to the reading the students are expected to do in conjunction with the course. The journal responses are personal in that they attempt to evaluate the reader's relation to the writing read. The student can discuss preferences for certain topics, styles, language, etc. Or they can try to articulate what they see as the writer's reality or try to reconstruct the writer's world by creating their own version of the writer's reality.

Finally, I talk to students about the writing process, about how I write, how that process has changed over time, and why writing is an important and satisfying activity for me. I encourage the students to respond in kind, either in class discussions or by in-class writings which are discussed. I try to clarify my expectations of them as writers and of myself as their reader and editor. We talk about some misconceptions about writing; for instance, that writing gets easier as you do it, that writing can be taught, or that "I know what I want to say but I can't get it in writing" is a form of self-deception. We examine why these ideas about writing are fallacies, why those fallacies exist, and what kind of reality they imply.

But most important, I stress the benefit of the revision process, both by talking about what occurs in that stage of writing, and by having students do extensive revision of their work in class where they can benefit from immediate feedback about their success or lack of it. We also look at professional writer's manuscripts, beginning with rough drafts and following through to the final version as a way to demonstrate that writing is a process that undergoes many changes for most of us. This helps dispell any expectations of divine inspiration and places the writer's task in a more realistic perspective for both student and teacher.

All this is a very tentative beginning. Like the proverbial housewife, I do not presume to have achieved perfection in the task I set out to accomplish. But I do feel less oppressed by the challenge of teaching composition, less weighted by an accumulation of obsolete ideas in my mental attic. My ideas have been tidied, my impulses restrained, and my values dusted off and polished. And although the real test comes when I enter the classroom where time and experience will wear away the gloss of newly acquired insights so that this task must be repeated ad infinitum, there is still the pleasant satisfaction of a job well done. The composition classroom is ready to receive its distinguised guests, the students.

Sources Cited

Dowst, Kenneth. "The Epistemic Approach: Writing, Knowing, and Learning." In Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition. Ed. Timothy Donovan and Ben McClelland. National Council of Teachers of English, 1980.

Eschholz, Paul. "The Prose Models Approach: Using Products in the Process." In Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition. NCTE, 1980.

Murray, Donald. "The Writing Process: How Writing Finds Its Own Meaning." In Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition. NCTE, 1980.

Teaching Writing to Minority Students

Neville Britto
Delta College

This paper attempts to deal with teaching college composition to blacks, with an honest endeavour to project a practical and pleasant way of dealing with controversial issues, namely college composition and black English.

The linguistic system of working class blacks has been referred to as black English. However, Paul Stoller has used the term to describe the linguistic system of all blacks in a given community (1975). Orlando Taylor suggests that black English be viewed in a broader perspective. He has classified black speech as a function of education and formality. Thus one could hear black speech and describe it as any one of the following: educated formal, educated informal, uneducated formal, or uneducated informal (1973).

There are many theories advocated about the teaching of college composition and black English. Some of these are: the cognitive deficit theory, the culturally deprived theory, and the bi-dialectal theory. College instructors of minority students should consider one or two of these theories so that the instructor may understand the problems involved with teaching minority students and find workable solutions to them.

The college composition teacher must be aware of the proposed "cognitive deficit" theory. As explained by Bereiter and Englesmann, this theory brands blacks with "verbal deprivation" and they are treated as inferior as if they have no language of their own (1966). In essence, these theorists work toward a complete doing away with black dialect, and view it as a deficient form of English. Smitherman explains that black English is viewed as an "underdeveloped version of standard English" and a "non-logical mode of expressive behaviour," lacking the "formal properties" necessary for the formulation of cognitive concepts. The linguistic concepts found wanting in black English, so we are told, are the concepts of negation and plurality" (1977).

This theory is unfair because it arrives at a conclusion from the premise that black dialect is not a vital part of the English patterns of black students. Blacks, who speak and write their dialect, are perfectly aware of its implications for their own-kind. However, since they are also aware that the same speech and writing creates problems for their anglo counterparts, they hope that they are not labeled "ignorant" or "verbally" deprived because of these dialectical patterns. The example of black English, "I asked did he want to go," is considered incorrect by the standard English version: I asked him, if he would go." In their evaluation of the black student and English, the cognitive theorists are hasty: Bernstein writes that "They do not consider the code used by the speaker of black English vernacular to be functionally adequate or structurally systemative" (1961). Cognitive theorists do not recognize that black dialect is genuine with its own vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. This unfairness is best illustrated by Baratz and Baratz when they explain that the cognitive theorist labels Negro dialect as "poorly learned English" (1970).

It behooves the instructor of blacks in a college composition course to be aware of this theory and avoid the pitfalls set forth by the cognitive theorists. If instructors analyze this theory carefully, they will avoid jumping to hasty conclusions about their black students, and any functional conflicts between lecturer and student can be prepared for and avoided.

Another school of thought sees black language and culture as being different but deficient. This school believes that the English spoken and written by black composition students is the result of archaic rural Southernisms. It is not uncommon to have these theorists label black students as "culturally deprived."

This theory presents a contradiction, since the heritage and culture of black people are as ancient, rich and well documented as those of standard English speakers. The wrong done to black students by these theorists is to label black students culturally deprived because they do not know as much about the culture and economic status of middle or upper class non-blacks. Blacks are looked on as deprived because they live in ghettos or inner cities, and hence they do not have the opportunities to be exposed to Anglo arts, music and social life, and hence their inability to write and speak as well as or "as good" as the rest of a white society. Because of poor family life and economic conditions, these black people are assumed to be deprived culturally, and hence it is implied that this results in their inability to speak, write, and use the "proper" type of English. It is not obvious to these theorists that the black student may be trying, through his or her writing and speech, to preserve legitimate African ancient roots. To label a cultural group (blacks) "culturally deprived" based on socioeconomics and values of predominantly Anglo-American society is not sound theory.

It should be remembered, that some social theorists hypothesize that the transference of a culturally deprived child to a culturally enriched home could enhance the deprived child's achievement and alleviate many of the problems faced by the child. I wonder. Would the results be a dramatic change for the better? Would better writing occur, coupled with instant A's?

Theorists who support the idea of cultural deprivation, acknowledge that black dialect and English are linguistically systemative, and that the speakers of black English do well in their own communities. However, the catch here is the demand for language uniformity for blacks in a white world and, as Smitherman explains, blacks need "to switch language in speech and writing in order to conform as situations warrant it" (1977).

It is difficult for black college students to walk in for a job interview and "rap" with the employer in a relaxed and natural manner. If the black wants the job and if he or she intends to make a good impression, the switch from black English to standard is a must. Few employers tolerate black vernacular. Similarly in its written form, many black students are going to be uneasy when they are asked to express themselves freely. When asked to write a paragraph on why they would like a particular job, intuition tells them to write, "I would prefer to work for your company because I have the skills to be of service to you, and the salary you pay is fair and attractive." (The flip side is to be relaxed and say: "I'd love to work here cause I can be the best and I like the way you pay us.") Further proof of the necessity of a language switch is evidenced in college entrance exams, in schools where high grades are sought, and in awards and even scholarships. This switch from black English to standard English frequently is necessary if you want to succeed in an Anglo-Americanized society, but unnecessary, and even frowned upon, if you want to be with the brotherhood. The bottom line in the switch is to avoid being labeled "slow" and being shipped to a speech therapist for lessons in language improvement or development.

Finally, instructors of college composition for minorities should analyze the implications of the "bi-dialectal" theory. Being aware of what this theory describes is important for better pedagogical preparation and instruction. Smitherman explains that the bi-dialectal theorist thinks that "since the white middle class writer cannot or will not accept the dialect of blacks, then blacks must accept and learn to use the dialect of white middle class." However, bi-dialectal theorists are not as radical as Smitherman states. They tend to understand that the total adaptation discussed by Smitherman in which blacks must adapt to white English is not total nor a fundamental requirement. Bi-dialectalists feel that:

a. The dividing line between language and dialect is not absolute. (Dillard, 1972)

b. Language facility and competence should be looked at from social function. This emphasis is especially important in studying the language function of black Americans, since it requires the interpreter/instructor to refer observed differences in phonology, morphology, syntax and function to their source of cultural experience. (Hall & Freedle, 1975).

c. Pluralistic ignorance which prevails in instruction arises from the instructor not knowing that the student's dialect is different from the instructor's own and the students do not know how the teacher's system differs from theirs. (Labov, 1972).

The idealogy of the bi-dialectalists is based on a better understanding of standard English and black English, that gives the instructor of black students in a college composition class an avenue for working toward understanding, and creating an environment of stable instruction and learning.

The cognitive deficit theory, the culturally deprived theory, and the bi-dialectal theory are harsh when viewed from the Anglo point of view; to the instructor of minority students, these theories should be an avenue of understanding a difficult cultural and pedogogical situation. The instructor of college composition for blacks should see that language is not the only problem: deeper down is the issue of culture. Thus, one answer to teaching blacks is to understand the issue of culture and language and these in turn will be a stepping stone to success.

Theories lead to questions about implementation, and a question that should be asked is: Does there really exist a difference in teaching writing to minority students--especially blacks? The answer is Yes. There are different problems that arise when teaching college composition to minority students. These problems lie not in pedagogy but in the understanding of the approach. And this is troublesome because of a lack of knowledge about black culture. Ralph Linton an anthropologist has stated: "Those who know no culture other than their own cannot know their own." Due to ignorance and an innate fear of the black race, instructors feel that their approach should be a "watering down" of the essentials in the writing process, preferential treatment, and allowances made for error. But this is not the norm followed for the approach to non-blacks. To repeat, there is a different approach to teaching college composition to minority students and it lies in the approach.

No matter how we approach writing, it is imperative to know that all black students can write. My theory is that black students must be shown the difference in the use of dialect and standard English. They must also be shown in a non-arbitrary manner why what they write is incorrect. It is important to discuss the comparative usage of standard English and dialect (black), with black students. This theory calls for dialogue. Talking down to minority students only frustrates them and gives rise to negative feelings toward the subject matter and the instructor. Demanding the use of standard forms is also a negative approach, as it projects a feeling of Anglo supremacy. What is needed is an understanding of the students during the writing process. An explanation of the problems associated with the writing process, and a solution to the problems of the writing process is urged. Encourage the black student to see how the learning of the difference between the standard forms and non-standard forms has its value within the writing process. An illustration of transference into other fields of education and work can be profitable.

The pedagogy of teaching writing to minority students calls for understanding, education (on the part of the instructor), and dialogue. If these are put into action, positive results will follow. I feel as Malcomb X:

> Understanding is brought about through dialogue. Dialogue is the communication of ideas that can only be brought about when you can speak a common language that others can understand.

Any instructor who prejudges or misunderstands the language or ability of black students to write and speak a common language as their Anglo counterparts, will find an obstacle course of barriers and problems.

So, if there is a difference in teaching minority students college composition, what is this difference? Smitherman suggests that "The crucial difference in American culture lies in the contrasting modes in which blacks and white Americans have shaped that language...a written mode for white, having come from a European, print-oriented culture; a spoken mode for blacks, having come from an African, orally oriented background. Oral tradition is part of the cultural baggage the African (black) brought to America." This is in essence the understanding of what black English writing is about, and this avenue of understanding and study should be pursued by the instructor of college composition who wishes to instruct minorities.

Being aware that there is a difference in the pedagogy of teaching writing to minority students, it is vital to find practical methods of instruction. I have found that there are a variety of practical methods available for an instructor of college composition who teaches black students. The success of these methods, depends on how they are applied to actual learning situations. The best methods I have used may be divided into approach and content. These methods are valuable and successful, and what follows is an attempt to explain how they work for me.

The approach of the instructor to the writing process is important. Minority students are aware that the instructor's assignment to teach the class is a challenge. They look for leadership. Leadership is not only expected, but also required in order to successfully teach minority students. Having been told what to do since grade school, black college composition students expect the same treatment at the college level. (They can work without being told, but they need encouragement to boost their self-confidence). Black students look for the instructor to lead them through the intricacies and pitfalls of the writing process, so that they in turn may gain self-confidence and writing security.

Instructors cannot be totally subject oriented. They must be problem solvers and tuned into the specific needs of individual students. It is beneficial if the instructor is not totally immersed in teaching the subject matter of rhetoric, essay writing, or the research paper. Break from routine and see how your minority students are doing. Should they have problems with organization, restructuring, or rewriting, the instructor must deal with those problems and help the student find solutions to the writing process to make it enjoyable. If Tequira writes well, but in a disorganized manner, the instructor should take the time to address Tequira's individual needs whether in a class conference or in an appointed office conference.

Success depends on the instructor's ability to emphasize the importance of mastering the process of composing. Herein lies the foundation of the successful writer. Students are taught to write, to write and communicate, and rewrite and communicate. While minority students are learning this task, the instructor illustrates the value and practicality that comes with doing this task well, and the benefits that accrue when these writing skills are transfered to other related fields of study. To quote Donald Murray:

> There is no way we can tell what our students will need to write in their lives beyond the classroom, but we can give our students a successful experience writing (1980).

Writing requires discipline, and when teaching minority students, it is important for the instructor to set a standard. This standard is to re-inforce the idea of pride and the role of leadership. Requiring only the student's best efforts and products is not too demanding. Keep the student aware of setbacks by conferencing and advice; encourage minority students to be proud and efficient in their speech and writing. Use the idea of self respect and pride to challenge their best writing abilities. If the instructor's attitude reflects these ideals, students will attune themselves to doing what is asked--their best. Dare students to succeed no matter how remiss their writing forms may be. When students know there is hope, they are remarkably generous in their response to subject matter and their instructor.

Practical methods in helping to teach black students also involve content. The question of mechanics or grammar has always been seen as the prime obstacle of minority writing problems. Unfortunately, it has also been used as the prime solution. Mechanics is just a code to be used with a minimum amount of drill and a maximum amount of "show and tell" when the situation warrants. Through conferencing, students are not taught the complete jargon of Warriner's, but rather they are shown errors as they occur, within the context of their own language.

Active methods of writing are very practical in teaching writing to minority students. Active means doing. The best results in class are obtained as students work on the writing process. Time blocks are arranged for writing in class in a variety of forms: description, personal writing, journal, points of view, and more. Writings are rehearsed and shared in class for peer criticism. Papers are then re-edited, rewritten, and read aloud. From each other's active methods of writing, black students are able to find areas of weakness and strength, areas of improvement, and areas that require help from the instructor.

Enphasis on finding errors or weaknesses is important to black students, having been told from grades 1-12 that they were writing incorrectly, poorly, and with "so many errors" that it lowers confidence. However, in a college composition class the errors are not to be used as symbols of ignorance, inadequacy or culture deprivation. They are, instead, to be used to show patterns in their errors, and therefore as clues to how improvement can take place.

When students reach obstacles in writing, they can be given models to help them visualize how a particular type of writing reads when finished. The model approach is an excellent tool of active writing, as it stimulates the "exploratory stages" in the minority student's writing processes. It gets students to imitate the models and then to produce as an individual. Caution must be used in the selection of models. The best and most effective models are well written student papers and essays, and brief paragraphs and essays by prominent blacks (Baldwin, King, Rosa Parks, Nikki Giovanni, Langston Hughes).

Another valuable approach in teaching minority students the skills of college composition is the writing inventory list. Sources for meaningful assignment lists may be found in the minority student's community and the people who govern that community or help it. Culture provides a wealth of information...customs, social life, music, and songs. Not to be forgotten is "soul"... its history and implications for blacks. Poetry, gospel music and drama are fertile sources of meaningful writing assignments. These sources are ideal for the student and instructor, because their help will produce and improve students' writing techniques, and this makes for meaningful writing tasks.

Individualizing instruction has been a rewarding and profitable method for me, in my teaching of black students. Office time is given to the student to express concerns, frustrations and problems with writing assignments and the writing process. The instructor uses this time to listen, instruct, and guide the student to self confidence and self-help. Conferencing is also used to help the student explain points of contention or changes made in the rewrite of a final paper. The objective of this method is not to baby or patronize the student, but rather to nurture talents that may be hidden during a classroom work session. It is also a major step to building the student's confidence.

No teaching method would be worthwhile if there wasn't an evaluation of its effectiveness. Thus, the instructor needs feedback. In an evaluative form created by the instructor, the instructor should find out from students how effective teaching methods, assignments, teaching materials and texts really are. The instructor should seek departmental help in working with negative evaluations, so that future classes may be more effective.

The teaching of college composition to minority students may appear a tough assignment for an English instructor. It is not my intention to leave the reader without ideas or resources from which to draw helpful ideas for teaching. I have found a wealth of knowledge in the sources I have used, and a review of some successful sources that have helped me as a teacher of college composition for black students seems in order.

A valuable source book is Dr. Geneva Smitherman's book

Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America. (Boston, 1970. Houghton Mifflin). In this book Dr. Smitherman gives an introduction and history of black English structure. She also discusses and illustrates the sounds and structure of present day black English, black modes of discourse, and black-white language attitudes. She concludes her book with appendices on black proverbs, sayings and semantics. The book is quite controversial. Smitherman is sharply critical of the bi-dialectical theorist calling them "deficient and rejectionist of Afro-American language and culture." She also believes there is a radical difference between teaching college composition to blacks and to anglos.

Eugene B. McCoy's copyrighted manuscript entitled Understanding Through Awareness, is an excellent materials publication. The manuscript deals with problems that face instructors of English as they work to teach writing to blacks. McCoy sets forth ideas for a personal rapport between student and instructor and advice on the avoidance of "double standards and anarchy in the classroom." The book also helps the instructor understand the language and cultured patterns of the ghetto and inner city, so that stereotyping and non-communication between teacher and student can be avoided. The manuscript also projects how the use of black heritage and music, song and church, may be used as practical pedagogical tools for writing instruction. This book helps the reader in analysis of the cognitive deficit and culturally deprived theories, as it helps the instructor see black language and culture as different and not deficient.

The college composition instructor of blacks would also be wise to know something about black English, and where to draw answers to problems. J. L. Dillard's book Lexicon of Black English (New York, 1977. Seabury Press), is an excellent resource book. The author discusses the social significance of a lexicon for black English vernacular, and terminology used by blacks in their social, cultural, and business lives. He concludes with an interesting analysis of the question: "Can we trust Literary sources as viable tools of instruction for writers who are black?" The conclusion drawn is only a firm maybe, but it is followed by practical answers on how certain literary sources may be used to advantage in teaching college composition to minority students.

Dillard espouses the cause of the instructor who would like to analyze the cognitive deficit theory. His book would be a valuable asset to also understand the "verbal deprivation" tag given to black students. Even though Dillard and Smitherman disagree with each other, this book will help the instructor better understand black English in order to better analyze Smitherman's controversial approach to the language of black America.

Espousing the bi-dialectical theorist is a Halsted Press book by William S. Hall and Ray O. Freedle. It is entitled Culture and Language. The Black American Experience. This book explores, in a unique manner, language experience in standard and non-standard English. As Klaus F. Riegel, of the University of Michigan, describes it: "It is addressed both to problems of language use and to investigation of research issues. It aims at an explanation of language differences and at an understanding of language difficulties. The authors succeeded in relating language development to cognitive and social conditions." The instructor of college composition of minority students will find this book stimulating, with many practical ideas about holistic cultures and subcultures, sociolinguistics, intellectual functioning problem-solving and culture fair tests, and the importance of "self-concept" and its effect on black identity. The use of this book gives the instructor a better understanding of the bi-dialectical theory. It also helps instructors deal with language and dialect not as an absolute dividing line, but rather as a possible cohesive means to improve writing skills.

Another resourceful book for teaching college composition to minority students is a Delta original by Paul Stoller. This book, Black American English. Its Background and Its Use in the Schools and in Literature, is practical. It will help the instructor understand and analyze the verbal deprivation theory. In conjunction with Dillard's book The Lexicon of Black English, it should provide answers to the terminology of black English and dialect. Articles of particular interest are: "The Logic of Non-Standard English" by William Labov, and Roger W. Shuy's article "Teacher Training and Urban Language Problems." These two articles were singled out for their practicality in helping instructors understand the issues and problems facing the teacher of minority students as they write.

Teaching college composition to minority students presents many problems, and what I have discussed in theory, practice and resources, is not meant as a cure-all. The most important thing to remember is that understanding black culture and black students is imperative. Also, keep after the students to be proficient, for with it comes a sense of pride that leads to accomplishment. We are well aware that only a few instructors have been taught to teach writing, and that many might rather teach other English classes than be burdened with teaching composition. To this may be added that fewer teachers expect or want to teach minority students and especially a class of blacks. Teaching college composition to minority students may be likened to an article entitled: "Freshman Composition: The Right Texts, but the Wrong Students Walk in the Door " (Dorothy Ginn 1976).

The challenge is ever present. It is a challenge to use a humanistic approach to teaching, and it is a challenge to be in constant communication with the student. And the final challenge for the instructor is not to judge. For if we are judicial, we are weakened and made less effective. The non-judicial instructor finds success in teaching black students, if heed is paid to Leo Strauss' motto: "Always assume, that there is one silent student in your class, who is by far, superior to you in head and heart."

Sources Cited

Baratz, Joan and Stephen Baratz. "Social Pathology Model Historical Basis for Psychology Denial of the Existence of Negro Culture." Washington, D.C. American Psychological Association Paper, 1969.

Bereiter, Carl and Siegfried Englemann. *Teaching Disadvantaged Children in the Pre-school*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966.

Bernsstein, B. *Class, Codes, and Control: Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971 (Reprinted, 1976).

Dillard, J.L. *Lexicon of Black English*. New York: Seabury, 1977.

----------. *Black English: Its History and Usage in the USA*. New York: Random House, 1972.

Hall, William and R. Freedle. *Culture and Language: The Black Experience*. New York: Halstead Press, 1975.

Labov, William. *Language in the Inner City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1972.

McCoy, Eugene. *Understanding Through Awareness*. Unpublished manuscript, 1972.

Murray, Donald. "Writing as Process: How Writing Finds Its Own Meaning." *In Eight Approached to Teaching Composition*. NCTE, 1980.

Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin' and Testifyin*'. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977.

Stoller, Paul. *Black American English: Its Background and Its Usage in the Schools and in Literature*. New York: Dell, 1975.

Taylor, Orlando. "Teachers' Attitudes Toward Black and Non-standard English as Measured by the Language Attitudes Scale." In *Language Attitudes: Current Trends and Prospects*. Ed. Roger Shuy and Ralph Fasold. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1973.

Listening for the Voice

Molly Allison
Michigan State University

When asked recently to describe on paper my model for teaching writing, I found myself "Engfishing" - writing in what Ken Macrorie calls the "say-nothing, feel-nothing, word wasting, pretentious language of the schools" (1980). I knew I was speaking in a voice I had heard somewhere in the land of propriety, but even after three trashed opening paragraphs, I couldn't stop faking it. I couldn't find my own voice. Frustrated, I write at the end of the description, "I guess it takes years to define a teaching model. Maybe it's a process." And maybe finding a voice is a process, too.

After listening to the unique voices of many college students, I know how crucial it is for writers to use their own words. When Steve, an advertising major and jazz musician writes about his years of playing guitar in junior high and says, "Fun was always had," I know that can't be his voice. When Tim says, "Deerhunting is a time of much excitement," it makes me think he'd rather not be writing. He doesn't hear what he sounds like. When Donna, a bright communications major writes, "The first information I received from the older students was the names and locations of the local bars," I wonder why she didn't say "Everybody told me about the hotspots." Maybe it's better she didn't! But listen to this sentence by Donna in the conclusion to that same paper on the grubby local bar: "As I walked out that night, my feet sticking to the floor, I knew I'd be back." Both voices, one stilted and one lively, come from the same writer.

Sheila talks about her boyfriend's tobacco chewing habit and writes, "Most certainly, the time he enjoys doing this the most is when he's driving." I wager Sheila hasn't said "most certainly" in her life. Yet later in her sketch she has the perception to tell us, "He sits down and rubs his feet together and scratches his head of brown curls." The voice is there; it's just stifled at times.

Liz, a graduate student in microbiology, waiting to begin vet school, wrote as one of her goals on the first day of class, "I want to develop a certain style." "Oh no," I thought, "that means voice." By the end of the nine week term, though, Liz could see that a conclusion she'd written to a warm, loving portrait of her grandfather sounded like the conclusion to a sociology paper. The class pointed it out, and we had fun making fun of the phoney voices in all of us.

But what about Kevin, Patrice, and Bob--conscientious students strictly programmed into adopting a "foreign" language when they write? The world of grammar and mechanics is too much with them. At least the others could see their shallow wording at second glance; but Kevin thinks contractions are illicit, Patrice can't hear her multi-syllabled muddle, and Bob loves words like "henceforth." But who can blame them? We're all Engfishers at times. It's just sad when students don't recognize the value of their own voices. Over dinner one night with a Parks and Recreation major who likes to talk about her experience with English teachers, I mentioned my concern with the problem of voice. When I began, "But if we speak in our own voices..." Karen completed the sentence, "it would be dull!" Karen, Kevin, Patrice, Bob, and the rest do not realize how welcome the sound of their voices can be. Perhaps we don't, as teachers, instill enough confidence in student writers. They don't think their voices are worth hearing.

I want to find out how we can help students speak in their own voices. How do we aid the student in what is a process of self discovery? When a voice does emerge, how can a student recognize it? What precedes this recognition? What kinds of teacher comments and classroom atmosphere evoke truth-telling? What effects does audience have upon voice? Finally, what kinds of assignments foster honesty?

Before we can attempt to answer these questions, what does it mean to find one's own voice? Does it mean simply "hanging loose," "writing freely," or "spilling one's proverbial guts?" Does it mean simply "writing as we speak?" Should I keep asking my students, "Would you really say this?" Leo Hamalian's definition is helpful:

> The true voice emerges when the writer or speaker stops evading his own thoughts or quits toying with his personal experiences and plunges into the unknown of himself without maps and compass. He inevitably will make discoveries about himself, as any committed writer does, and he will feel compelled to report them, not in ready made phrases from the marketplace scotch-taped together, but in his own unique, personal idiom. In writing then, the 'voice' is a refinement of that instrument that brings out the spirit of the person and cuts out the chaff in his prose (1970).

David Holbrook defines voice as a "sincerity, a feeling of openness, liveliness, animation." Holbrook asks, in assessing a child's writing, "Is there evidence that this has been a productive, reasonably enjoyable writing experience for the student?" (1967).

How then can a student stop evading thoughts, plunge into the unknown, and develop a unique idiom? Walker Gibson suggests the paradox that through role playing, writers express their very selves. All English teachers, says Gibson, would agree on one concept: language as drama. "When we recognize that choices of language are dictated not alone by subject matter, and not alone by audience, but involve as well a self-creating act, the taking on of a role with a personality, an attitude, an identity-- for some, at any rate, that perception offers a part way out of the woods." Suggesting that by playing a role, the writer raises the question "Who am I anyway?" Gibson advises the student writer: "...here are some choices of self expression; adopt one tentatively, always aware that it's an expression and not a self..." For Gibson, the more roles in a writer's repertoire, the more wisely the writer can choose an effective voice (1969).

When I was home for Spring break this term, I went to my sister's house for a visit with my nephew, David. We played "Grocery Store," travelling from shop to shop, delivering ice cream loaded into a black Tonka driven by two cowboys, Jack and Joe. We unload at Kroger's, and in the deepest voice he can muster, David says gruffly to the cashier, "Thanks lady," and then to Jack, "Let's go get some grub." On to McDonald's via K-Mart. Walker Gibson might say we all need to try out a few of David's, or any three year old's playful voices. We all change voices in response to audience and subject, says Gibson, from the time we are small children; but we can make these changes conscious if we expand our range of choices. He urges the student writer to study the styles of speakers like Holden Caulfield and David Copperfield, to manipulate a speaker's language and create a new persona, to turn off the television and make up the voices, to write scripts and create distinct characters, to imitate a newspaper's varied personas, to write fictional letters mixing self and a traditional persona, etc. As I read Gibson though, I keep wondering if role playing masks a writer's own voice. In answer to a similar question, "Can't we simply speak and write as ourselves, honestly and candidly?", Gibson says yes, as long as we know that "even our most 'honest' acts are indeed acts..." (1967).

The theory of role playing sounds like fun, especially to students willing and happy to experiment. I'm still wondering though, how students can discover their own voices along with the voices role playing evokes. For Miles Myers, part of the process is understanding why people talk the way they do--realizing that there is a "tradition of meaning" which influences language choices. A student who asks, "Do I have to add so many details like Hemingway does?" needs to discover that the person behind that voice is a person of action--to him the world has only the fact of sensory experience. Myers sees a need to study the values behind language. He, too, suggests role playing as a means of achieving this understanding. (To rewrite Bogart's final speech in Casablanca in the words of Sir Laurence Olivier might be one method.) But Myers acknowledges the drawbacks of role play as a method of creating persona: "To approach pieces of student writing as examples of role playing is to empty the writing of meaning and demean students' efforts to understand their experiences" (1981). I suspect that isolated exercises in assuming personas might make students aware of the kinds of voices they hear in writing, but might work best when students have already recognized their own voices and can produce variations of that score.

While the trend in the United States is to speak of "voice" in language, Basil Bernstein, a British professor of sociology, offers an alternative. He discusses "registers" of language (1973). The language we use varies according to five factors: subject matter, situation, participant relations, mode and medium of discourse. In the following examples, the participant relations factor--who is speaking to whom and what is the personal distance?--accounts for the different registers:

A. I wondered if I might be allowed to leave earlier today. There are some personal matters I should like to settle this afternoon.

B. I've got this thing to do at home. Is it all right if I go off earlier today?

A greater personal distance exists between employee and boss in sample A. Speaker A is tentative and less certain than Speaker B. Bernstein's idea of registers might help a student who is creating too much personal distance between reader and writer. By discussing the five factors which determine register, a student might gain a sharper feeling for the important elements of audience and subject matter.

Ken Macrorie advocates "free writing" as a means of finding the right voice: writing nonstop until "the pen or typewriter takes over and the writer watches his words go down on paper" (1970). Whether or not freewriting is the answer, it may help the student break through that Engfish barrier.

How else can we aid students in recognizing their own voices? Donald Murray suggests that much of the responsibility rests on the students' shoulders. He lists a writer's four tasks: find a subject, document material, choose a form, and earn an audience (1969). Murray's first task is an important one. I know I have invited bad writing with useless, vague, constraining, or just plain boring topics. When we talk about things we don't care about, our voices become dull and lifeless. The seventeenth time a college freshman begins the stock conversation signalled by "So where are you from? What's your major?", the authentic voice disappears. Change the topic to something the speaker loves, hates, questions, remembers, and the voice comes back. I was beginning to think Carol really was a boring writer until she hit upon subject matter that mattered. Hallelujah for sheep and marching bands. Kathy's prose was lifeless until, in a delightful voice, she revealed a well kept secret-- she was a "closet preppy." Though we should provide many springboards for all kinds of writing, students must make the subject matter their own. Choice is important, and often student ideas are better than my options.

If there doesn't seem to be a voice at all in a piece of writing, not even on the horizon, does it mean that the writer is voiceless? Of course not. Leave "voiceless" to the fricatives and check the assignment:

Is the assignment always the key to voice? Margaret loved horses; I know she cared about her subject matter, but her writing still conformed to a voice she'd heard, like me, somewhere in the land of propriety. Her prose was paralyzed--"The injuries that are the results of having such air-borne ways of losing riders can be quite painful,"--but she didn't recognize it. Maybe she, like many students, had always been rewarded for writing in convoluted language that sounds important. When she decided to write a play by play account of the crazy tournaments in her dorm, Margaret's voice had arrived: "We are here, live, at the dreary and dismal Hubbard Hall to bring you the annual weekly, semi-weekly or whenever Twelfth Floor Pan-Am Golf Tournament." Besides a fun topic of her own, the new form and an imagined TV audience brought out a clever voice. Role playing worked.

If the student, as Murray says, must find a topic, document material, choose a form, and earn an audience, what are the teacher's responsibilities in fostering voice? Perhaps to nourish growth by creating a comfortable classroom atmosphere, supplying a flexible and optional range of topics, organizing small and large group peer audiences and audiences beyond the classroom, allowing time for the writing process (pre-writing, much revision, etc.) and offering thoughtful feedback at the right time.

As teachers, we are urged these days to comment on only one aspect of a student's writing at a time. I know I am guilty of what Murray calls "irresponsibly conscientious correcting." During my high school years I used to wait ravenously for comments on my essays, I loved it when a teacher wrote paragraphs of reaction. Now I remember that feeling, and pour out my responses on students' unsuspecting pages. Murray would ask, "What will students do when they have escaped the protective custody of the English teacher?" He's right. But what does all this have to do with voice? I suggest that our written comments tell the student writer whether or not we are listening. If we talk back with too many comments, we haven't heard. If we focus only on mechanics, we haven't heard. But if we search for the message, and let student writers know whether or not we have heard, then at least they will know they are worth listening to. And maybe they'll keep writing.

How do we let a student know we have heard the message? By commenting on the piece of writing as a piece of writing, not as an assignment. Give a reaction, not a correction. We tell someone we're talking with to "speak up" if we can't hear. We don't give the warning, "Next time we hold a conversation, speak louder." Why then, as Stephen Tchudi points out, do we keep getting the student ready for "next time?" Tchudi says our goal must be to help the student have a "satisfying experience with his writing as quickly and as effectively as possible" (1973).

If we are listening for a voice, we'll hear something - even if it's only one sentence. Once we do, we must let the writers know they have come through. Let Todd know that you never knew much about Roscommon County or "smelt dipping" until you read his paper. Tell Kelly his guide to puppy rearing made you, a puppy hater, reform your ways. Disagree with Al's idealistic solution to the prison problem in Michigan. Let Jeff know that you admire the courage it must have taken to work at a refugee camp, but you want to know more about what he did there. Lest we get carried away with affirmation though, James Moffett warns:

> If a child's hungry cry is met with only deep sympathy and not also with food, the results would be as bad as if there had been no emotional response...should his smile, inviting to play, be met with a tender smile from the parent but lead to no playing, then, too, he loses interest in both his environment and the wish to communicate feeling (1970).

I hear myself telling students to speak in their own voices, but most of us don't speak in our own voices to just anyone. Think of the surface conversations we conduct every day. Why should the student reveal any interests, hopes, worries, experiences, dreams or ideas to a teacher who seems pleasant enough, but who may not care? If honest voices are to emerge in any kind of writing course, even if the writing is scientific, the class must be comprised of students who want to hear their fellow writers' voices. How do we create that listening climate?

When we meet an acquaintance and begin a casual conversation, we normally try to remember relevant facts about that person's life. We might ask, "How's your wife? Had her baby yet?" or "Heading to Cleveland for the holidays?" So we must try to remember what students' voices tell us in writing. Is it unrealistic to think that a teacher with fifty or more composition students can have fifty personal facts ready for recall when he or she meets a student in the hall? Perhaps I'm showing my newness to the profession when I say that we must try to learn a fact or two about each writer--hometown, major, best writing so far--so that he or she knows we are listening. But more important, that peers are listening. When students try to recall a favorite phrase or detail from each other's work, or when students hear their voices remembered, they know they were successful; the class was pleased, provoked, saddened, enlightened, puzzled, delighted, reminded. Students can begin to recognize when a writer steps out of an authentic voice and slips into laryngitic language. And a student's comment that a voice isn't ringing true is much more powerful than a teacher's.

If we expect students to speak in their own voices, we have to speak in ours, too. When I was in the ninth grade, Sister Mary Joy told us how she decided to become a nun; we thought she had guts. Although as teachers we don't need to reveal earth shattering personal truths, we should share experiences which may help create trust, demonstrate a point about writing as process, spark an idea for a topic, or illustrate our problems as writers. A warm classroom climate is vital if the students are to share reactions to writing. So that exposure isn't threatening, all reactions should be positive at first. And in a class where much feedback takes place, there has to be lots of laughter.

I set out in this article to discover how we can help students find their own voices. From my observations and experience as a rookie, I would say at least five factors facilitate this process of self discovery:

- a classroom climate of trust, honesty, and fun
- freedom for the writer to choose subject matter, form, and audience
- plenty of peer feedback and revision
- a teacher who responds to a piece of writing, not to an assignment, and written comments that say the reader is listening
- a teacher who speaks in his or her own voice

It would be, however, the subject of yet another paper to pin down what these mean in practice.

Though we can't teach writing by lecturing, we can keep assuring student writers that their voices are unique--that we want to hear them. I said I never knew what voice meant until

I began teaching, and it's still hard to define. It can't just mean writing as we speak, because the two processes are so different. To a group of students, voice is:

- writing using language and structure that is comfortable for the writer. Not using a style that the writer must concentrate on to maintain.
- making it sound right, not necessarily look right.
- the ability to convey to the reader a personality through words.
- writing so that the reader believes that what he or she is reading is coming right from the writer.
- projecting the feelings of the ideas that the writer tries to portray.
- to "sound" like yourself writing, not someone else.
- believing in yourself.

They seem to have the idea. But what about Kim, who writes, "I still think that what I write has to be written for the approval of the reader, not necessarily what I enjoy." "Reader" in this last definition of voice probably means "Teacher." Writing, according to many students and teachers, is written to be graded, and not meant, as Leticia Molter said at a recent writing conference at Michigan State University, "for students to make sense of themselves and of their lives."

There is a voice inside every writer. Once we hear it--at least one whisper of that unique sound--we must let others hear it, and let the students hear their voices resound.

Sources Cited

Bernstein, Basil, ed. Class, Codes and Control. Volume II. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973.

Gibson, Walker. Persona A Style Study for Readers and Writers. New York: Random House, 1969.

Hamalian, Leo. "The Visible Voice: An Approach to Writing." English Journal, 59 (1970), pgs. 227-230.

Holbrook, David. *Children's Writing: A Sampler for Student Teachers*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1967.

Macrorie, Ken. *Telling Writing*. Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Co., 1976.

-------------. *Searching Writing: A Contextbook*. Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Co., Inc., 1980.

Moffett, James. "Learning to Write by Writing." In *Teaching High School Composition*. Ed. Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Murray, Donald. "Finding Your Own Voice: Teaching Composition in an Age of Dissent." *College Composition and Communication*, 20, (1969), pgs. 118-123.

Myers, Miles. "What Kind of People Talk That Way?" *English Journal*, 70 (1981), pgs. 24-29.

Tchudi, Stephen. "Writing for the Here and Now." *English Journal*, 62, (1973), pgs. 69-79.

A Reading/Writing Course for ESL Students

Margaret Quesada
Michigan State University

For the non-native English student, even an advanced student, lack of a wide vocabulary is a real hindrance in the reading process. A thirty-year old foreign student could possess the English vocabulary of a thirteen-year old native student. And yet, one does not want to subject that student to infantile reading assignments. As a result, often, reading texts for these kinds of students are specially written with their vocabulary limits in mind. Or, original texts are simplified to deal with the students' limited vocabularies.

To overcome this problem, and to try to allow students to read more realistic and interesting material, reading classes for ESL students frequently become lessons in vocabulary building. One of my classes became almost that. Half of the time in class, we focused on vocabulary building exercises which included guessing vocabulary either from context of the passage or from recognizing its stem or an affix, and learning how to choose one of the many meanings of a word listed in the dictionary when all guessing procedures failed. The other half of the time in class was spent reading and discussing short readings. Discussion often meant answering and going over a set of comprehension questions following the reading. However, sometimes class discussions would arise from the students' reactions to or questions about the readings. Different types of reading were done in order to anticipate the future needs of the students in academic classes. We did scanning for main ideas, skimming for a particular set of information, slow, detailed reading for thorough comprehension, and general reading for enjoyment. The readings were of varied lengths and topics.

Some interesting things happened in that class. The students generally disliked the vocabulary building exercises but worked on them diligently because they felt the exercises were "good for them." What students enjoyed the most were the fiction selections from their book, especially the humorous short stories and mystery tales. Often, after reading one of these, the class would ask me, "Do you know of other stories like this one that we can read?" or "What other stories has this author written?" I gave the class a list of short stories and novels that I thought they would enjoy and encouraged them to choose from this list for their outside reading assignment.

Their outside reading was an on-going assignment which was to read at least fifteen minutes a day of whatever they wanted. They were to jot down any new vocabulary they learned from the readings, a brief summary of and their reactions to their reading. I was pleased to see the kind of reading the students chose to do for this assignment. Some chose sports magazines or journals from their own field of study but a majority of them chose short novels that appeared on their list. Some of the choices included, The Red Pony and Travels with Charley, Steinbeck; The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, C. S. Lewis; The Dog Who Wouldn't Be, Farley Mowat, The Call of the Wild, London; and The Old Man and the Sea, Hemingway. Before and after class the students talked with one another about their outside readings and kept each other abreast of the developments in their books.

Often, during the course of the term, I longed for more time for the students to discuss these readings and to write down more complete reactions to them. It was then that the idea came to me: Why not teach a reading/writing class based on the kinds of readings the students were so obviously enjoying?

Traditionally, the culmination of any language study has been the reading of the literature of that language. Where there has been a great deal of emphasis on the teaching of culture, the literature of that culture has been used as the means by which to introduce it.

John Povey points out that many teachers of English as a second language have seen as the purpose of teaching literature to non-native students its linguistic practicality (1979). Literature could show the ESL learner the wide variety of syntax and a rich variety of vocabulary. It provided examples of English used in effective, subtle and suggestive ways. Further, it could serve as a model and target for the students' limited linguistic skills.

Albert Marckwardt is convinced that "it is in literature that the resources of the language are most fully and most skillfully used" (1978). He feels that students who are capable of using the language with great skill should study the literature of that language.

Marckwardt also maintains that in teaching literature one teaches the culture upon which the writing is based and the language's structure and vocabulary. But the learning of structure and vocabulary is merely a by-product. The principal purpose should be in the sharing of the "literary experience." Marckwardt goes on to state that an introduction to literature should be sheer fun. Comprehension and enjoyment are important--to stimulate reading for its own sake. Sandra McKay also agrees that what is most important "is the enjoyment attained by interacting with the text" (1982). Povey, as well, points out that "literature has traditionally been defended on firmer ground than its linguistic practicality," and suggests teaching literature for its own qualities.

When a teacher selects a passage or story in order to teach new vocabulary or structures, the students learn only the vocabulary or the structures, if they learn that much. They gain little else from the reading selection. However, when the teacher chooses a passage or story for its content's appeal and the focus of the lesson turns to the comprehension of and reaction to the text, then the student gains much more. The discussion of the text can initiate individual self-examination and classroom interaction which, as Povey suggests, "are highly dependent on vocabulary and are stimulating in the search for self-expression."

Povey feels literature should be taught because both the teacher and the student believe the activity is valuable in itself. Any other gain from that activity is a by-product. If that by-product is the learning of the culture, the widening of vocabulary and the more skillful use of the language in general, then how much more basis could the ESL teacher have for using literature in the classroom?

I agree that reading and writing about literature should be fun. The students enjoy reading stories that are funny, unusual, personal, clever, mysterious. They enjoy telling others about it; they enjoy writing about it. They are using language to enjoy language. They are using language to communicate the enjoyment. This could be a marvelous way to combine a reading/writing class. Reactions to and questions from the readings would supply the bases for the topics for writing. Charles Bazerman feels that the realtionship between reading and writing is essential (1980). Reacting to reading, he says, "gives students a sense of their own opinions and identity defined against the reading material."

As students try to relate what they have read to what they already think, they will begin to explore their own selves, their own ideas and experiences. The students will be talking and writing about themselves based on the readings they encounter. They will discover a new world that is surprisingly tied to their old one.

I highly suspect that if students become involved personally in language in an enjoyable manner, and read a lot, talk a lot and write a lot, soon they will possess language skills far surpassing those who have spent hours in vocabulary and grammar drill exercises.

In light of these views but based mostly on my experiences teaching ESL reading and writing, I designed a reading/writing course for advanced-level students using contemporary short stories and portions of novels. I chose short readings rather than novel-length ones because this way students will have the opportunity to read many different kinds of works. They will be able to read a complete story each day and gain immediate satisfaction from their work. Also, if they are unhappy with a story, or find it particularly difficult to get through, they won't be stuck with it for an entire week or two weeks. In addition, it gives me, the teacher, a chance to see what kinds of readings are more suitable for non-native students. Later on in the course, the students will have the opportunity to select and read any novel for their own interest.

The course is designed to fit into a ten-week intensive English program but certainly could be adapted to an eight or even six week program. The course is designed for an advanced-level because my teaching experience has been mostly with these kinds of students. More important, advanced students are ready to begin grappling with the more complex structures and vocabulary they will encounter in literature. Advanced students are more capable of using their language skills for real world communication.

I chose two broad categories of short stories which form the bulk of the class readings: American short stories and short stories from other countries which have been translated into English. The class begins with the American stories because I have found that when foreign students first come to the United States, they have as much desire to learn about the country and its culture as they do to learn the language.

To begin the class, I've selected three, light and humorous passages from accounts of traditional, American family life. The first selection is a chapter from Clarence Day's Life With Father, "The Gift of Song," where father tries in vain to teach his tone-deaf son to sing. The second selection for the first week is the first chapter of Cheaper By the Dozen, by Gilbreth and Carey. Here, the authors explain how it came to be that their parents had twelve children. The third reading is a chapter from My Family and Other Animals, "An Attack on the Family." The author, Gerald Durrell, as a boy, enthralled with scorpions, discovers that his family isn't. These readings may prompt the class to discuss traditional family life in their own countries and how it is similar to or different from the United States.

During the second week of the course, the class focuses on stories that reveal parents' views of their children growing up. For the first assignment of the week, I've chosen two very short stories on how children face their illnesses: "The Use of Force," by William Carlos Williams and "A Day's Wait," by Hemingway. The second assignment is an account of a successful man's worry over his wayward son in "The Ambassador," by Lawrence P. Spingarn. The third reading is Saul Bellows's "A Father to Be," which tells of the anxiety a man has in supporting his family. Often, parents view and treat children very differently in different cultures. Students can learn much about a culture just by understanding these views. Also, students can clarify some of their own ideas about parenting.

The last two weeks of the American short stories focuses on the theme of living in America with hardships, such as living in poverty, belonging to a minority group, or possessing some kind of physical handicap. Five short stories, all very different but moving in their own way, were selected. "Split Cherry Tree," by Jesse Stuart, describes a boy's growing up in the poor rural countryside and leading his father to understand the importance of a school education. "The Wit of Porportuk," a Jack London adventure, portrays the life and growth of a beautiful Eskimo woman, who after her father's death, must somehow pay the debt he left with her. In "Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone," James Baldwin tells the story of a small black boy's life growing up in the slums of Harlem. A shortened version of Daniel Keyes, "Flowers for Algernon," relates a fictional account of a retarded man (through a scientific experiment) becoming one of the world's most intelligent men and then his regression back to his original mental state. The last story, "Clothe the Naked," by Dorothy Parker, is about a boy growing up in poverty, being black, blind and an orphan. It is hoped that students will see a part of American life not often seen by foreigners, but a real part nonetheless. These stories, I hope, enable students to talk about some of the harsher realities of this "land of golden opportunity" seldom seen in movies. Students also have the chance to speak of their own countries' struggles with social problems.

In the fifth week, the students read a short novel of their own choosing. This gives students a break from the assigned readings and an opportunity to explore on their own the type of reading they prefer. A list of suggested novels is provided; however, the class is by no means limited to the list. Those students who enjoy light humor may go ahead and read the full length versions of *Life with Father*, *Cheaper by the Dozen* or *My Family and Other Animals*, or perhaps something more contemporary such as *Travels With Charley*, by Steinbeck or Farley Mowat's, *The Dog Who Wouldn't Be*. If students are interested in adventure there is London's, *The Call of the Wild*. If they like personal struggle, Carson McCullers', *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter*, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* or Steinbeck's, *The Pearl* are good choices. Those interested in fantasy can choose from among C. S. Lewis' Narnia tales, Madeleine L' Engle's A Wrinkle in Time books or, for faster readers since it is longer, Tolkein's, The Hobbit.

By the sixth week of the course, the students should know each other well enough to take an interest in each other's countries and cultures. This often happens and sometimes the students go so far as to teach each other a bit of their own languages. This is a good time to read about and discuss stories from other lands. It's a good idea to try to read at least one story from the country of each student in the class, or if that is not possible, to try to find one from a country closely related in culture to that of the student. Stories from countries other than those represented by the class are also good. Many foreign students are interested in other cultures and like to take advantage of their contact with them in the United States to learn as much as they can.

For this description I have chosen thirteen stories, representing six of the seven continents, excluding Antarctica. Besides being delightful reading in and of themselves, each story reveals something of the culture and country from where its author comes. For example, Ru Zhijuan's, "The Path Through the Grassland," tells of how a young girl in China has to choose between the man she thinks she loves and paying her duty to her country. She chooses her country. In "Exile," Gideon Telpaz, from Israel, relates a tale of three Bedouins exiled from their tribe because one of them has been unjustly suspected of a crime. "Rains," by Pira Sudham of Thailand, is a story of a young boy praying and sacrificing with his village people so that the gods will send rain to their parched land. The list is completed as follows: "The Jump," Thorir Bergsson - Iceland; "Pictures on a Wall," Joy Cowley - New Zealand; "Thank-you, Dr. Coué," Robert Muller - France; "Tears for a Tailor," E. G. Chipulina - Gibralter; "Through the Tunnel," Doris Lessing - England: "Midnight Mass," Joaquin Maria Machado de Assis - Brazil; "I'm Telling You the Truth," Juan José Arreola - Mexico; "Gloria's Saturday," Mario Benedetti - Uruguay; "The Voter," Chinua Achebe - Nigeria; and "The Gentleman of the Jungle," Jomo Kenyatta - Kenya.

When reading and teaching stories from students' native lands, the teacher should do background work so as to understand, as much as possible, the context of the stories and any customs or ideas referred to. Foreign vocabulary, such as used in de Assis' work, "Midnight Mass," should be looked up. Certainly the students themselves will provide rich sources for interpretation. It is an excellent opportunity for students to share their culture and to use their English for real communication.

Students do all reading outside of class. The day before an assignment is due, the class as a whole goes over some of the more difficult vocabulary and idiomatic phrases students may have trouble with. The teacher gives the item and then presents an example or two to clarify its meaning. In and of itself, this is an ineffective way to teach vocabulary. But if done before a reading, it gives students some idea of the word's meaning when they come across it. If, during the explanation, the word or phrase is not clearly understood, usually in the context of the reading its meaning can be understood. Students then do not have to stop the flow of the story and look up a lot of unknown vocabulary. The teacher tries to keep this type of pre-reading exercise as brief as possible. Any words in the reading that most students can, or should, understand from context alone should not be discussed.

The class is not given comprehension questions to check their understanding of the story, as is often done in ESL reading classes. Rather, they are required to keep a reading journal, and for a few minutes after each reading, write down their reactions to and any questions they may have about the story. In reaction, they may describe a particular character they liked or didn't like, sympathized or didn't sympathize with. If they had an experience similar to the one in the reading, they can tell about that and how the story relates to their experience. Many of the readings raise an issue which the students may want to address. Or they can simply summarize and/or talk about in general what they liked or didn't like about the passage. They write in a way that shows to the teacher that they have not only read the story, but have done some thinking about it as well.

The class has a reading assignment due every Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. These are discussion days. The first few minutes of the class are used to discuss any other vocabulary or syntactic items not understood and any questions in general important to an overall understanding of the reading. On these days the teacher has prepared-discussion questions ready. I have found that a non-native class does not respond well to opening discussion questions such as, "What did you think of the story?" The question is too broad. These students need more focus. Thus, prepared discussion questions are necessary. The questions can be given orally, put on the board or run off on a mimeo and handed out. I prefer the latter so that the students have something concrete in their hands to work with.

Some days the class as a whole may discuss the readings. However, in a class of twelve, fifteen or more students, some prefer remaining silently in the background. It is easy for only two or three really talkative ones to monopolize the entire discussion. Therefore, I prefer breaking students up into smaller groups. Here, they have the security of a group without the teacher directing everything and they have more opportunity to speak out.

In these small groups the students may either discuss the teacher-prepared discussion questions or they may share the contents of their writing journals. At first, they rely on the teacher-prepared questions, but as they become more familiar with each other and more confident of their own reactions to the readings, they should share more of the journal content.

Thursdays and Fridays there are no reading assignments. These are writing days. On Thursday, the students begin a draft for a two-to-three page paper. They may choose to write on any of the discussion questions relating to the readings of the week or they may choose to expand on any of their journal entries. The teacher is available at this time for any comments, suggestions, or questions raised during the draft-writing process.

Fridays are revision days. Students are expected to work on revisions before coming to class. During the class time they meet again in groups of two or three for peer editing. The rest of the hour is spent writing out the second draft. Again, at this time, the teacher is available for conferences.

At the end of the term, the students have a portfolio of nine, somewhat polished, papers, plus a journal with almost daily entries. The last week of the program, the class is required to select one of their nine papers for a final revision. This they can do in groups, in conference with the teacher, or alone if they feel confident of their revising skills by that time. The final papers are gathered together and put into a class book. This latter exercise I do with every writing class and it is always successful. The students feel proud of their accomplishment and enjoy seeing their papers printed for others to read.

The aims and purposes of this class are manyfold. First, and most important, it is hoped that students will read a lot and enjoy what they read. They will read, not to build up their English language skills, but to experience the sheer joy of discovery--of finding out what other people have to say about the world around them. Through this discovery process, the students will learn about themselves. They will use spoken and written language to explore their own experiences, thoughts, feelings, and their new-found discoveries.

Secondly, it is part of the design of this course that students improve in their English-language skills. It is an inevitable by-product. The students are immersed in the language-- reading and writing it, speaking and listening to it. They need to use the new structures and the new vocabulary they learn in the readings in order to express their own thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the readings.

Finally, it is expected that as the students focus on what the language has to say rather than how it is said, they will enter into a new relationship with the language. They will begin to use their second language much as they have used their first--to communicate, to discover, to experience, and to enjoy not only the world around them but the one inside of them as well.

Sample Lesson Plan

I. Assignment: Read "The Gift of Song" from Life With Father by Clarence Day.

(This is a story about how Father tries to teach George, his oldest son, to sing. George is tone-deaf and can not learn. Father, however, is persistent and the lesson continues for more than two hours. Finally, much to George's relief, Mother calls them for dinner. Father is frustrated that he hasn't succeeded and that Mother doesn't appear to support him in his endeavors.)

II. Difficult vocabulary items:

blacking shoes - polishing shoes; "Father believed all boys should learn to black their own shoes."

to have no ear for music - to have no talent or ability for music; "I can't sing or play the piano; I have no ear for music."

raw material - natural products used in manufacture; "Father saw his sons as raw material to be molded into great men."

a scale on the piano - an ascending or descending series of tones or notes all divided into equal intervals or spaces; "To learn music, first you must learn to play a scale on the piano."

with relish - with great pleasure; "He always eats with relish."

haphazardly - casually, by chance, not in an ordered or careful manner; "George isn't very careful; he always speaks haphazardly."

no notion - no understanding; "I have no notion as to how a car runs."

a deadlock - a stopping point in a disagreement or discussion because neither side will agree or compromise with the other; "The two countries' discussion on nuclear arms came to a deadlock."

to get the hang of something - to become used to something and skilled in doing it by practicing; "Driving a car is hard at first but after a while, you get the hang of it."

to execute a maneuver - make a movement with skill or ease; "Father wanted to end the unsuccessful lesson but he wished to execute the maneuver without admitting defeat."

III. Questions for Discussion:

1. In "The Gift of Song," Father feels it is very important for his sons to be well educated in many areas. Do you agree?

2. Is it wise for parents to insist that their children participate in activities that they (the children) are not good in? or don't like?

3. In this story, Father is very stubborn. Is this a good quality to have? Why or why not? How might it hurt his sons? his wife?

4. The boys in this story are very obedient to their parents, especially to Father. Is this common in your culture? From what you know of modern American society, is this still true? Should children always try to please their parents even though it may be painful or embarrassing for the children?

5. In the U.S.A., it has traditionally been believed that parents should spend a lot of time with their children and take part in their education. Is this a common belief in your country? Is this still true in the U.S.A.?

6. In this story, Father always tries out his new ideas on George because he is the oldest son. Is this fair to George? Is life more difficult for the oldest child? or easier?

7. Father seemed upset that Mother didn't support him or understand what he was trying to teach the boys. To what extent should parents always agree with each other? Is it bad for them to disagree with each other in front of their children? Why or why not?

Sources Cited

Bazerman, Charles. "A Relationship Between Reading and Writing: The Conversational Model." *College English*, 41 (1980), pgs. 656-661.

Marckwardt, Albert H. *The Place of Literature in the Teaching of English as a Second Language*. Honolulu: The Univ. Press of Hawaii, 1978, 8 and 66.

McKay, Sandra. "Literature in the ESL Classroom." In *TESOL* Quarterly, 16 (1982), pgs. 529-536.

Povey, John. "The Teaching of Literature in Advanced ESL Classes." In *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. Eds. Marianne Colce-Murcia and Lois McIntosh. Rowley, MA: Newbury House Pub., Inc., 1979, pgs. 162-186.

Short Story Bibliography

Foley, Martha, and David Burnett, Eds. *The Best American Short Stories* 1963. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963.

----------. *The Best American Short Stories 1968*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1968.

Mancini, Pat McNees, Ed. *Contemporary Latin-American Short Stories*. Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1974.

Moffett, James and Kenneth R. McElheny, Eds. *Points of View: An Anthology of Short Stories*. New York: A Mentor Book from New American Library, 1966.

Short Story International. 5 (1981) pg. 29.

----------. 4 (1980) pg. 21.

----------. 4 (1980) pg. 19.

20 Grand: Great American Short Stories. New York: Scholastic Book Services, 1967, 5th printing, 1971.

Warren, Robert Penn and Albert Erskine, Eds. *Short Story Masterpieces*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1954.

Winds of Change: Modern Short Stories from Black Africa. London: Longman Group Ltd., 1977, 2nd ed., 1979.

Reading in a Writing Course: Bad News and Good News

Martin J. Wood
Michigan State University

About halfway through my morning science writing class we have stalled, and I'm feeling insecure again. My students--eager science majors in the last term of their first year in college--are not getting the point of the article we've read for class. Brian Clarke's "The Causes of Biological Diversity," in the August, 1975, *Scientific American*, is not the easiest piece of scientific prose we have read, but neither is it the hardest. His argument is subtle, leading the reader through several alternative explanations, discarding them one after another until he proves that natural selection actively encourages variation within a species. It is really quite an elegant argument. But my students seem to have run out of comprehension near the end of the article.

It occurs to me that I could avoid all this by delivering a lecture on the successive steps in Clarke's argument. But, as always, I remind myself that class discussion is a much better way for them to learn. And I can see little point to discussing what might otherwise seem logical matters for a writing class--diction, sentence types, paragraph topics, transitions, introduction, conclusion--when my students are not even sure they know what the article says. Now where was I? We have narrowed our focus from a discussion of the interesting points my students felt Clarke raised--we were sidetracking for a while on woodland and grassland snails--to his description of the mechanisms by which natural selection might maintain genetic diversity. I poke around some more: "If we agree that Clarke is not enthusiastic about heterozygous advantage, does he pose an alternative?" Long pause. A student hazards, "The resistance to malaria thing?" No, that was part of the heterozygous section, I say to myself. "Well," I fall back again, "how many mechanisms are there?" Another student, confident now, says, "Two. He just said two." "Oh," one shouts, "the minnows and waterbugs thing." "Frequency-dependent selection," adds another, and we are rolling. "What do you think about that?" I ask, exhaling. Soon we have the content under control, and can talk again about whatever interests us.

I use reading assignments in my science writing course because I think they help student writers. For one thing I recall how E. Fred Carlisle (who developed our year-long science writing sequence here at Michigan State University) describes the way his course "examines a scientist's motives for writing: the characteristics and effects of each form (style, rhetoric, and audience); the differences and similarities among conventional scientific writing, popular, historical, and philosophic scientific writing, and non-scientific writing; and the ways each type explains, supports, and extends the other" (1978). I assign these kinds of reading partly because my writers should get a feel for the broad range of demands that may someday be made on their writing skills. And as one of my students has said, "The more styles we're exposed to, the better writers we'll become." But I believe also that careful, analytical reading can teach the reader about the process of making meaning--a process that writing obviously shares in. Finally, I have become convinced that reading as a way of experiencing the world is crucial for any writer's growth. So my students read often, and for each assigned reading they write responses--analyses or commentaries in rough-draft form--in a notebook they keep for the class. On the next class day we discuss the reading and the responses, starting with student interests and questions, moving through the article's content to make sure the meaning has come across, and ending again with student interests. We usually discuss readings on two days during the week, though we devote a part of each day to critiques of volunteer student papers by the entire class. The third class day, students conduct a rough draft workshop featuring peer editing.

My classroom use of reading stresses content in so far as it can be discerned from everything else in a piece of writing. But as I illustrated at the outset, this use causes me (and perhaps my students) some pain; I decided I would like to know if it is worth it, if it helps their writing development enough to compensate for their effort. Unfortunately, the current consensus on the best use of reading in a writing course is in some ways like the format for an old joke: there's good news and there's bad news. The good news is that many teachers routinely and conscientiously assign reading in their composition courses; they agree that students' writing benefits when students read. The bad news is that no one agrees why. In fact, each teacher who uses reading with writing may have a unique rationale. Unfortunately, not all reasons are theoretically sound. As surely as there are good ones there is at least one bad one. First the bad reason. Most teachers are probably aware of individual professors--or maybe even whole departments--who bring literature into the writing classroom because it is the only subject they can teach. Their classes become essentially little literature courses; they may assign papers which they will grade a bit more specifically on grammar and mechanics than those in their big literature courses. As Paul Eschholz notes, citing Robert Gorrell for support, such is no longer a composition course at all (1980). Teaching writing means affording time for lots of writing practice and lots of careful evaluation and response; too much concentration on reading denies this.

Now for the good reasons. Some teachers advocate using prose as a kind of model or exemplar for students to follow (or imitate) in their own prose. Among these teachers disagreement exists on whether to introduce the "models" before any writing begins, during the composing process itself, or only and when individual students seem to need them. Paul Eschholz's article on prose models (1980) argues for using the last two methods more or less in tandem. He encourages all his students to read widely in their anthology, he tries to match student interests to their readings, and finally he keeps a file of reading selections--indexed according to various rhetorical attributes--for use when students encounter specific difficulties. Other teachers employ readings to give students ideas for their own papers, supplementing students' experience or showing them how professional writers have put life into their recollections and conceptions. Still others may use reading because it supplements writing: it is the other half of a communicative cycle they feel they ought to be teaching, and cannot imagine exclusively teaching what they see as only half a process. And some, of course, justify combinations of these reasons.

I confess myself a follower of this last camp. Certainly students who read a lot have more to write about. On the other hand, I suspect that mature reading involves critical faculties closely related to those we use in producing and assessing our own writing. It seems to follow from this that any reading exercise students approach seriously and inquisitively will strengthen those critical faculties, and that this strengthening must improve their writing in the long run. I am willing to concede that the course of writing improvement is a very long run indeed. But if I am going to require students to wait a very long time to realize palpable results from what I am teaching, I think I owe it to them to try and find out if my methodology is a reasonable as I think. Is it worth the pain I mentioned earlier? I decided to ask the students themselves.

As I have said, my course is part of a year-long sequence in writing for freshman science majors. I assign various scientific books and articles throughout all three terms, including Stephen Jay Gould's Ever Since Darwin, James Watson's The Double Helix, The Dispossessed by Ursula LeGuin, reprints from Scientific American or Science 82, chapters from Werner Heisenberg's autobiography Physics and Beyond, and so forth. For these readings, written more or less for general audiences, I avoid directing students' attention to specific concerns either ahead of time or during discussion. When we read articles from professional journals, however--like Gould's "Bizarre Structures" in *Evolution*, or Watson's original DNA article in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society*--I caution them in advance that they will have to skim incomprehensible matter at times, or I provide historical context, or I may even make them outline sections of the article. In all cases we discuss in class the most recent assignment we have read.

Because I believe that reading's efficacy for student writers inheres in its exercise of their growing critical ability, as well as in its natural tendency to broaden their experience, I approach our class discussions intending to delve deeply into the content of each article, probing for the meaning students find in what they have read. As they read carefully enough to apply their own analytic techniques to the author's premises, and then write free responses in their notebooks, and then discuss all this, they are engaging in a creative use of language. For one thing they have more experience to write from. For another, their activity is, I believe, something akin to exercise, enlarging their capacity for writing production. But other composition classes are not necessarily conducted this way, even when they employ prose, and when I began my survey I thought that to be fair I should ask students besides my own what they think reading does in a writing course. One colleague teaching the same science-writing sequence believes like Eschholz that reading's value lies mostly in its presentation of models and illustration of techniques, and her class discussions focus accordingly on techniques and examples. With her permission I asked her students the same questions I asked mine. After preliminary questions about students' reading behavior and preferences, I asked, Do our discussions on the readings contribute to your understanding of them? Do you enjoy the discussion more than the reading? In what ways has this course helped you as a developing writer? What aspect of the course--reading or otherwise--has been the most help for you as a developing writer? What do you consider our best method of discussing our readings? Do our discussions make the readings more helpful as parts of a writing course? And finally, What would be the best possible use of reading in this course? I should like first to report what all students said about the reading-writing connection in general, which I will follow with a comparision of responses between my colceague's class and mine.

Perhaps my most important discovery--though hardly a surprise--is that students like the notion of reading for a writing course. Few students--very few--see reading as an activity totally peripheral to writing. And even one of these few reports, "I don't think the readings have developed my writing. The papers have. The readings have developed my thinking."

Who am I to argue? Most students, however, readily accept as common sense our implied connection between the processes. Over eighty percent--34 out of 38--report that they enjoy reading anyway, and that fiction is their favorite choice. But as busy college students they have little time for recreational reading. In fact, though nearly all of them claim to have read a lot in recent years, most reveal that they can spend only a few hours a week reading if they don't include homework in the total. And this, they say, has been the case since high school. I now suspect that much of the reason they enjoy reading for a writing course is that it requires them to do something they would like to do a lot more often anyway. After all, whatever an instructor's rationale, reading for the writing class is bound to feel qualitatively different from the reading students have to do for their chemistry, history, and social science classes. Writing teachers teach an aspect of literacy; they should encourage reading for whatever reason. All of this suggests to me that the least effective kind of reading assignment a composition teacher could make would be something that feels like homework--reading in a grammar text, for example, or a style manual, or (god forbid) a treatise on composition theory.

These same harried students, whose alleged functional illiteracy and television-crippled attention spans have lately received widespread coverage, agree almost unanimously that, given material they enjoy, they can read for an unlimited amount of time without losing interest or becoming distracted. Virtually all of them declare that they read the course's assigned reading in one sitting between the days we meet. This suggests that students enjoy the readings and are not merely fulfilling requirements, doing homework. But student enjoyment is not the main issue. The time they invest in the course should repay them at some future date in the form of a more efficient or satisfying writing system, or more confidence when they set about to compose. Questions of reading aside, most theorists will agree that writing practice yields such repayment for time invested. Now any hours allotted for reading assignments necessarily subtract from those available for writing practice. Can teachers justify exchanging established methods for an activity the students merely enjoy? The crucial issue is whether the reading assignments truly help writers develop. Teachers must take care not to assume success everywhere they have seen contented students.

There are in fact several reasons why reading may increase the apparent success of a writing course, and yet not be very helpful in the actual improvement of a student's writing. It is possible that activities related to reading or attendant upon its incorporation in the course are more helpful than the reading itself. At the very least, for example, readings must be assigned, and so some class time is expended in describing

Who am I to argue? Most students, however, readily accept as common sense our implied connection between the processes. Over eighty percent--34 out of 38--report that they enjoy reading anyway, and that fiction is their favorite choice. But as busy college students they have little time for recreational reading. In fact, though nearly all of them claim to have read a lot in recent years, most reveal that they can spend only a few hours a week reading if they don't include homework in the total. And this, they say, has been the case since high school. I now suspect that much of the reason they enjoy reading for a writing course is that it requires them to do something they would like to do a lot more often anyway. After all, whatever an instructor's rationale, reading for the writing class is bound to feel qualitatively different from the reading students have to do for their chemistry, history, and social science classes. Writing teachers teach an aspect of literacy; they should encourage reading for whatever reason. All of this suggests to me that the least effective kind of reading assignment a composition teacher could make would be something that feels like homework--reading in a grammar text, for example, or a style manual, or (god forbid) a treatise on composition theory.

These same harried students, whose alleged functional illiteracy and television-crippled attention spans have lately received widespread coverage, agree almost unanimously that, given material they enjoy, they can read for an unlimited amount of time without losing interest or becoming distracted. Virtually all of them declare that they read the course's assigned reading in one sitting between the days we meet. This suggests that students enjoy the readings and are not merely fulfilling requirements, doing homework. But student enjoyment is not the main issue. The time they invest in the course should repay them at some future date in the form of a more efficient or satisfying writing system, or more confidence when they set about to compose. Questions of reading aside, most theorists will agree that writing practice yields such repayment for time invested. Now any hours allotted for reading assignments necessarily subtract from those available for writing practice. Can teachers justify exchanging established methods for an activity the students merely enjoy? The crucial issue is whether the reading assignments truly help writers develop. Teachers must take care not to assume success everywhere they have seen contented students.

There are in fact several reasons why reading may increase the apparent success of a writing course, and yet not be very helpful in the actual improvement of a student's writing. It is possible that activities related to reading or attendant upon its incorporation in the course are more helpful than the reading itself. At the very least, for example, readings must be assigned, and so some class time is expended in describing writing a paper. The discussions have given students a chance to speak out in order to gain confidence in their ideas." Such a statement is strong encouragement for the teacher who would like to use reading during or even before the prewriting stage--to "prime the pump" as Stephen Judy has put it (1980). The discussion, students are saying, is crucial. However, when asked directly about the best use of reading they could imagine in a writing course, some indicated that other uses than discussion take precedence, as I shall report presently. But in general, students agree heartily that the opportunity to hear peers' viewpoints on published prose aids their writing improvement; after all, they have previously come to value peers' opinions on their own writing.

One of the students who enjoys the reading-related discussion more than the reading itself remarked, "I think more about the readings during the discussions." She conceded, "The reading is also very important," but went on to discuss the course's requirement of a written response to every assigned reading. Although she claims to have considered each reading in the light of the response she would be writing, and would go so far as to outline the putative response, she says, "I write my responses after discussions." Since these responses are highly informal, personal, almost journal-style drafts, her hesitance to commit a premature response to paper is intriguing. Our assignment of workbook responses is the result of several years' observation which suggests that students consider more carefully their reading assignment when they have to put words on paper. This more careful consideration, in turn, yields more interesting class discussion. Students hand in the workbooks randomly, on demand, throughout the term. Random collection encourages compliance with the response assignment, and compliance is supposed to inspire more careful reading. But my hesitant student seems to feel that her own informal commentary is untrustworthy--that she can write with confidence only when she and others have discussed the material. She is also beating the system, by the way, and I'm delighted; she is determined to learn in spite of my rules. Most students, none the less, react in the expected manner: they supplement reading experience with discussion, and use their reading-responses as a means toward this end.

It is possible that reading as I employ it is successful for writing students only because, in the form of these reading-responses, I am requiring additional writing practice. Perhaps this is so. Surely all writing practice is good for students' growth as writers; if nothing else, reading thus seems an interesting and stimulating means of getting them to write more. But many students think of the responses as drudgery. In practice, a few put the work off until they think I am about to collect the workbooks (they are college students, after all). They like the reading and probably benefit from it not because of the written responses but in spite of them. It is likewise possible that students benefit from the reading itself not because of, but in spite of my more or less directive approach. I choose the readings, I set up discussion days, I assign written responses. By the time students go to their workbooks, the whole procedure may feel a lot like an exercise, something they perform merely because I require it. An alternative then would be to have them select their own readings, according to what most interested them. But this procedure would not be without its own flaws; what this alternative gains in written response quality and general comprehension it may lose in overall benefits because it affords fewer common subjects for class discussion. And discussion appears crucial. As I have said, some prefer discussion of readings to the reading itself. Typical of these students is the one who cites discussion's elucidating potential, favoring it "especially when I am confused about the underlying meaning of the reading." Another elaborates, "There were several times when I missed a point, or didn't understand the context. Discussion brings out everyone's impressions, arguments, and discoveries into the open for the rest of the group to see."

I hinted a moment ago that students do not agree (despite their apparent enthusiasm) whether reading or discussion of reading--or neither--is the single most important part of the class. My colleague's class and mine are run as workshops; when rough drafts fall due we set aside an hour for the students to critique one another's drafts. These sessions generally occur on alternate days from those when reading discussions take place. A large number of students--almost half--report either that the workshop format, or the critiques, or (in a couple of cases) instructor commentary on papers is the course's most helpful feature for them as developing writers. Another third or so--12 of 33--credit writing practice for giving them the most help. Only about twenty percent think that reading does more to improve their writing than either of the other methods. Even so this seems to argue in favor of including at least some reading in every writing course, in order to reach that twenty percent who feel it helps them more than any other feature. One student mentioned "all the different types of articles" as the most helpful portion of the course, and connected with this her perception of "a freer approach to writing papers." This same student located the value of the readings in their portrayal of the wide variety of scientific writing being done in the world; she credited them also for their demonstration that understanding the nature of one's audience is essential.

Even among the majority who feel that reading is not the most important part of the course there appears little sentiment for getting rid of it. Almost all students mentioned one or more changes they would make in the course design if they had power to do so, and although a few noted that they would include more writing practice, not one single student suggested that we read less. A couple of requests appeared for fewer of the highly technical articles in professional scientific journals (the Royal Proceedings article on DNA is one main culprit), but these were not complaints about the amount of reading done for the course. A few students wish to see an end to the workbook responses, and a couple others think the teacher should do more to stimulate student interest in some of the difficult readings. But taken together there is no sentiment either to eliminate or to curtail the reading we now do, which averages twenty-five or so pages of scientific prose per week. Most of it is either professional-level description and analysis, or science-related essays aimed at a popular audience. Once in a term we read a work of science fiction. Since almost every student lists either fiction or science fiction as his or her favorite kind of reading, I am not surprised that this portion of the course is the favorite of half the students. In fact I wonder that it is only half; perhaps the other half would respond similarly if they had been able to make their own reading selections. This other half--many of whom clearly prefer fiction under other circumstances--almost unanimously cite the popular-audience essays (like those in Gould's book, which were written originally for Natural History magazine) as the part they most enjoyed. In sum, then, they want to keep a variety of reading assignments, none overly technical; they want to discuss the publications in class; and they consider reading less important than other activities but too important to do without. How then should we integrate it with those other activities?

Certainly the most interesting fact I discovered comes as a result of the different ways my colleague and I make use of reading in our respective classes. As I have mentioned, she favors a rather more rhetorical approach than mine, although we both use workshops, peer critiques, large-group discussions of student writing, and very nearly the same body of assigned reading. Her classes seem at least as happy with her as mine are with me, and when we compare their year-ending group writing projects we find them writing at about the same competent level. The difference in our approach hinges largely on the way we assign and then discuss our readings. She presents readings as models of the various modes of scientific discourse the students will eventually produce, and often connects articles specifically to upcoming paper assignments. She also favors more directed writing tasks than I, and will give specific instructions for workbook responses to most of the prose the students read. Her instructions generally tell students to pay attention--as each article seems particularly to demand it--to the structure, organization, use of metaphor, process of argument, transitions, introductions, or conclusions. Then, when the students come to class having read the material (and, one assumes, written their responses), she engages them in a discussion over those very areas, asking them to make vocal the kinds of responses they have felt.

In contrast I only occasionally request anything more detailed than a record of whatever in the article students feel moved to write about. When I do ask for more detailed analysis or commentary, it is because the article we are about to read is unusually long or complex. Borrowing a tactic from my colleague, I may break it up into sections to be handled by groups from the class, or assign an outline or structural analysis. But these occasions are infrequent. The responses my students write tend mostly to concern the content of what we have read; this also is where I begin my class discussions. Often we do not go beyond an analysis of what the reading was about. When the students themselves strike out in a rhetorical or structural direction--when they say, "Is that why Gould always starts with an anecdote?" or "Dickerson specifies his outline twice before he even gets out of the introduction... He's afraid we'll get lost"--then I am happy to follow. However, it is the path less traveled in my class.

Which path works best, and why? I asked our students specifically in what ways the readings had been of value to them as developing writers, and looked at their answers class by class. Their responses clearly echoed--and, I think I can say, reinforced--the beliefs of their particular instructors. More than two thirds of my colleague's students locate reading's value in the way it can be a model for their own writing, or an exemplar for style. One student sees the reading assignments as "a connection to my writing assignments in class." Another finds that the readings "showed well-written examples of what we had to write." One of her students is more blunt: "I've seen writings I've liked and some I've disliked, so now I have a clearer idea of how I should write." A smaller number--three or four--mention the new ideas they got from their readings, or the way they are made aware of changes in the rhetorical situation. As one put it, the readings "give me a clearer idea of the ways a paper can be revised for a different audience." Thus my colleague's class follows her lead--reading material is most valuable as a model or an object for rhetorical study.

My students, on the other hand, reported some of the very benefits I had in mind as I taught. Almost half--7 of 15--claim that reading helps their writing by the message it conveys, by making them think about new ideas they can go on to write about. They mention how the articles arouse their interest, make them more creative, daring, or exploratory, provoke them to use their imaginations, and introduce them to further interesting subjects. One fellow is quite elaborate on this point: "I've learned how to 'show'the reader more. I can better understand the need for an interesting piece of writing. And the reading makes me more aware of the things needed to make a paper coherent." Another speaks of how the readings have been aimed at different audiences, and added, "I think I now have a more creative thought pattern due to this course." A classmate agrees: "The readings sparked my imagination and kept me interested in writing." The rest of my class, however, takes the rhetorical path in spite of me; they value reading not so much for its content as its portrayal of "writing models" or "audience awareness," in about equal proportions. To a certain extent students may infer this kind of rhetorical purpose in both classes, merely because what we nominally teach is writing; the function of reading in the writing course may require for some of them a more direct, more linear, almost cause-effect rationale. But in general it seems safe to say that students will provisionally accept our individual justifications.

The question then arises as to whether this acceptance translates into conviction: would students design a writing course like this one? I asked them how they would suggest using reading, and I received what were by then fairly predictable replies. Exactly half of my colleague's students think that a use of prose as models for student writing--complete with analyses of techniques and style--would be the best way. I believe they think this for a very good reason: it has apparently worked for them. Only about twenty percent of my students think the technique-analysis approach would be the best; this too is understandable, since we rarely used this approach, and they have little direct experience from which to draw their opinion. The other half of her class, and the remaining eighty percent of mine, chose heavily for discussion itself, with no conditions attached, or else for discussion that covers ideas, thoughts, content. The best use of reading, these students say in a restatement of an earlier response, is to discuss it. And what they wish to discuss about it is what it means for them. One of my students pretty much sums it up, "I like using reading to better understand science." "To learn more about the science world," a classmate added, "and how we as scientists will play our part." For students like these, reading functions as a broadening of experience; I am admittedly taking it on faith that writing improvement follows. But because this is the use of reading they would design for their own writing courses, I think my faith is well placed. In fact a careful look at my results suggests that students would prefer I employ this use even more regularly than I did for them. In this respect, at least, my course seems to have been less helpful to them than they believe it could have been.

I reported earlier that about a third of all the students (irrespective of which instructor they had) consider reading to be the most helpful portion of the course. But when our different classes' opinions are counted separately, the responses vary in an especially interesting and suggestive way.

More than half of my colleague's class (10 of 18) derived most benefit, they say, from the workshop critiquing and commentary on their own writing; most of the remainder cite writing practice. Only two--just under ten percent of her class--feel that reading was the most helpful feature for them as developing writers. But my students divided pretty neatly into thirds, citing the reading, the writing, and the critiquing about equally (6, 5, and 5 of 16). I am not sure just yet what to make of this. I am tempted to guess that the idea-centered, non-rhetorical approach to our readings indirectly makes them as important and valuable as the other main activities in the course. That would certainly be convenient, since equal benefit from equal time invested--as I suggested at the outset--is the ideal rate of return. But I must stop a bit short of this conclusion at present for a couple of reasons. It is possible that my emphasis on reading left little enough room for writing that my students could not help but claim equal benefit from each. To this I can answer that my colleague's percentage of class time (and assigned homework) devoted to reading was virtually identical to mine. It is also possible that in most cases the students answer the survey questions in ways they think their instructors would like them to, even though they remain anonymous. I cannot flatly reject this possibility, but I pay it little heed. As the potential benefactors of any improvement we might discover in writing pedagogy, students do not deserve to have their opinions dismissed lightly. So I accept, with qualifications, what they have told me. The qualifications are large; my survey was too small, my methods informal. But I do have some ideas I didn't have before.

I have learned nothing conclusive, have made no revolutionary discovery, have indeed found less than I hoped I would. I recognize, however, what I surely have not learned: I have not learned that my colleague's students failed to benefit from the reading in her class. It is only clear that they do not perceive reading to have been as helpful as writing practice or the workshop. And in a way this is not surprising. Her approach makes reading more distinctly and specifically a tool for writing improvement. As such, it clearly must rank lower than writing practice--a tool of well established value. My approach may allow students to consider reading as important as writing because, I think, they can treat it as gaining new knowledge, or experience. It does not have to compare with writing practice as one tool with another, but instead as a faculty compared with an application--or, loosely, a competence with a performance. Reading, and especially talking about reading, forms the basis of another dimension of experience out of which writers will write. And at the same time, these writers are nurturing critical skills that will help them further to understand--and then write about--their growing world. This is only a theory, exciting but unfinished; maybe it will turn out to be a little bit of good news.

While what I have heard from my students persuades me that my use of reading is effective, I am not persuaded that my colleague's is less so--far from it. Apparently, students will make a sound method work for a teacher they trust. Surely only those instructors who maintain consistent theoretical approaches can hope to inspire trust and keep it for a year. Granting this, then, a few things are clear. In a science writing course, at least, students think reading assignments help them become better writers. Discussion must accompany reading use, and its method must be determined by the instructor's consistent, sound pedagogical beliefs. Writing practice and workshops are still of central importance. Then, if reading is to be a classroom tool to illustrate writing techniques or to portray exemplars, the instructor should focus on authors' techniques and rhetorical strategies. On the other hand, if student experience toward assimilation of a reading/writing process is the teacher's goal, that teacher should probably focus on reading content and ideas.

All in all, there is bad news and good news regarding reading in the writing course. The bad news--and it is not so bad--is that we still have no definitive statement on the best use of published prose for a composition class. The good news is that students are accomodating and forgiving; as long as we give them our best, they agree to learn from it.

Sources Cited

Carlisle, E. Fred. "Teaching Scientific Writing Humanistically: From Theory to Action." English Journal, 67, No. 4 (1978), pgs. 35-39.

Eschholz, Paul A. "The Prose Models Approach: Using Products in the Process." In Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition. Ed. Timothy R. Donovan and Ban W. McClelland. Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1980.

Judy, Stephen. "The Experiential Approach: Inner Worlds to Outer Worlds." In Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition. NCTE, 1980.

Teaching Business Writing: Theories and Strategies

Jennifer Smith Young
Michigan State University

University English department are intensifying the drive to teach practical writing skills to students from a wide variety of academic backgrounds. Many of these students will eventually pursue careers in environments which will require skill in composing business correspondence (i.e., letters, sales proposals, instructional materials, reports, etc.), due to the corporation's increased emphasis upon written communication. Business and technical writing courses may therefore be expected to play a larger role in college-level composition as universities become more oriented toward education as a means to attain career goals.

Business writing as a specific field of study is a relatively recent development on campus, and a number of composition theories and methods may be used effectively in the classroom. Some theories stress the relationship between technical and nontechnical (i.e. "creative") writing. For example, Donald Murray's process approach to writing and Linda Flower's problem-solving theory may be successfully incorporated into the teaching of business writing. Both creative and business writing involve similar patterns of thought in the preparation, drafting, and revision of the final product. Thus, there is no immediate need for either business experience or a great deal of preparatory reading in order to conduct a business writing course.

This is not to say that knowledge of the world beyond the university is not helpful in creating a dynamic business writing environment. In fact, the more of the "real world" that can be brought into the classroom, the more students can see the applicability of their writing in actual job situations. The best business composition course thus combines good, solid writing theory with the realities to which the students' written efforts can be directed.

Business Writing as Process

At the heart of Donald Murray's process approach to writing is the idea that what writers commit to paper in turn informs and leads them in directions which they may or may not have anticipated. Even though business writing textbooks heavily accentuate the planning/organizing stage of composition, it is acknowledged (though not by all textbook authors) that written communication may come to assume a different perspective during the act of writing. As David Ewing explains in his Writing for Results:

> Writing is somewhat like having a baby, in that no matter how carefully you plan and research in advance, you may learn and experience things from the doing that you never dreamed of in the beginning. (1979)

Murray himself stresses that his process approach to writing may be successfully applied in all fields of discourse. He states that the continuing cycle of rehearsing, drafting, and revising takes place regardless of the environment in which writing is produced.

The concept of purpose is interpreted as an aspect of writing which evolves coincidentally with the creative act. In an article published in 1980, Murray states that "Writing is a significant kind of thinking in which the symbols of language assume a purpose of their own and instruct the writer during the composing process." He describes the act of writing as "a constant revolt against intent," meaning that writers are constantly involved in a process in which they question, resolve, and question again the motivations and objectives which they are committing to paper. Therefore, the teaching of business writing as process may well allow students the greatest opportunity to learn the art of correspondence, simply because this approach perceives the individual's interaction with his or her own material as an integral part of learning. Ultimately, students must develop their own writing objectives, as well as interpret and challenge those same objectives as the writing takes shape. For this reason, Murray's process approach appears to be especially useful in encouraging business students to think (and rethink) for themselves: a vital requisite for the demands of the "real world."

Business Writing as Problem-Solving

Linda Flower's problem-solving approach to writing concentrates heavily on real-world applications; her book, Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing (1981), is, in her own words, "about the kind of writing people do when they know something they want to communicate to a reader who wants or needs to hear it." To Flower, "Good writing is intensely functional";

it exists in order to inform or influence the reader. She also explains that "Good writers do not simply express themselves; they plan their writing around a goal they share with a reader and design it to be understood and remembered." Therefore, the essentials of real-world writing include planning, control over the written subject matter, and careful consideration of the audience. As we shall see, Flower's tenets for successful writing are echoed by the great majority of business textbook authors.

Flower describes good writers as "people who have developed better ways of attacking the problem of writing." This statement is central to her conception of the writing process. Her perception of the task of writing as a dilemma which must be methodically resolved, entails a well thought-out plan of execution which is carried out in a controlled fashion. She describes her book as "a set of strategies for dealing with a problem you can solve"; these strategies include planning, brainstorming, organizing ideas, anticipating audience response to one's writing and gearing the writing to a specific readership, and testing (editing) the resultant draft(s) before submitting the finished product. Such a methodical approach to the writing process affords business students an excellent opportunity to organize and draft their writing with a clear definition of their readership, as well as revise subsequent drafts to correspond to the needs of their audience. These needs become more focused as writers gain competence and control over their work.

The overriding tenet of Flower's philosophy involves "making meaning": in other words, making sense of complex situations ("problems") through the efficacious use of words. This is best effected systematically, in order that writers may attain control over their intention/objective, their readership, and the process of writing itself. Clarity and persuasiveness are other components of Flower's approach to composition (although persuasion is not always the writer's objective), and these may also be incorporated into an heuristic writing approach for students of business and the technical arts.

Important Elements of Business Writing

Although Murray and Flower's writing theories may apply to business as well as creative writing, the business writing student must be prepared to communicate in an environment which is likely to be far removed from that of the creative writer. This section will examine the criteria which shape the process of business composition, comparing them to those which are experienced in non-business writing.

Both creative and business writers direct their work toward a specific audience. While creative writers may compose for themselves, more often than not they intend for their work to be read by others. The business writer's audience usually consists of employees who operate at different levels within the corporate hierarchy. Both writers must anticipate the needs of their audiences. In addition, the quality of their written work is immediately responsible for determining their competence or credibility within their respective environments.

Assessment of the writer's competence on the basis of his or her writing reflects a condition which David Ewing lables the "risk of permanency." As he explains:

> Unlike words spoken in conversation, the written word stays indelibly clear for an indefinite period. And if it is photocopied for hundreds of people to read, it loses none of its authenticity, as the spoken word does when repeated person to person.
>
> Thus writers assume a greater risk of permanency than speakers do. They have to live much longer with their words. They would be fools not to appraise this risk seriously on those many occasions where relationships are delicate, sensitive, or charged in some other way that may lead them to regret their words as soon as someone has read them.

Thus, writers must choose their words carefully in order to lead the reader in a designated direction. And once those words are committed to a typed page and distributed, their meaning is unalterable. Business writers, then, must approach their task systematically, paying strict attention to three major concerns: the definition of their objective through careful preparation, the consideration of the situation and audience which their writing will address, and the realization of their established purpose within a designated time (or deadline).

An idea which is shared by many writers is that successful writing often develops as the result of inspiration: that some sort of nebulous force infiltrates writers' minds at a given time, compelling them to compose outstanding correspondence which fits the needs of their audience perfectly. It is of primary importance for business writing instructors to undermine this myth before students begin writing in the classroom. Instead, students should incorporate the concept (as stated in The Business Writer's Handbook) that "successful (business) writing is not the product of inspiration, nor is it merely the spoken word transferred to paper--it is primarily the result of knowing how to structure ideas on paper." And, in Flower's words, "...writing is not simply a game of chance you play with your muse. Writing is a thinking process" (1982).

Planning may take the form of freewriting, lists, or outlines. It is up to the individual student to discover what method serves to define and organize the ideas that will constitute his or her written assignment. What is important is that students should not wait for inspiration; rather, they must generate it.

As I previously stated, business writing must be approached in terms of the environment in which it is conceived and the recipient(s) who will analyze it. Ewing calls this a "situational" approach. As he explains:

> (the situational approach) exploits the purposiveness of writing in business, government, science, and the professions. It does the same thing for writing education that it does for the teaching of medicine, law, management, engineering--indeed, of any field in which there is a clear, definable aim and a method of measuring results. It makes objective analysis and comparison of alternatives possible.

In the classroom, students should not undertake a writing assignment until they understand the appropriate "situation" which will form the context of their writing. Likewise, they should have their audience firmly in mind throughout the writing process. These criteria may be formulated by the instructor, or they may be left up to the students' own personal requisites. What is important is that students internalize the essence of business writing strategy: namely, that they must be sensitive to the shifting priorities of their environment and their readership.

The dialogue between writers and their audience constitutes the writer's purpose. To business writers, purpose is translated into persuasiveness, or the skill with which writing can communicate a point of view (whether it be in the form of a memo, a proposal, or a statement of policy) that compels the reader to adopt it as a plan of action. According to Ewing:

> There must be one or more persons whom we want to influence; we should have a practical motive for influencing them; and it should be clear to us how we want them to act or think as a result of our communication.

Writers persuade their audience through the use of controlled manipulation of language. The language may be either casual or formal, depending upon the context of the writing. But they must exercise control in the analysis of their audience, the organization of their correspondence, and the style in which they must compose it.

Emphasizing control as a technique for writing undermines both the idea of inspiration as a motivating factor, and the theory that there exists a formula which addresses all the situations with which business writers must deal effectively through written communication (for instance, memos recommending promotions, letters of complaint, technical reports, etc.). In other words, the situations toward which business writers must direct their efforts vary considerably; consequently, they must adopt a frame of mind which will address these situations as they arise.

Students of business writing must incorporate the fact that they will almost always be working against a deadline. They will not possess the luxury of time to wait for inspiration to infiltrate their thoughts. In fact, the reality of an impending deadline may well prevent their anxious brains from producing any sort of blueprint for their assigned task. By stressing techniques which help writers define their goals--whether through freewriting, outlines, or lists--teachers create a writing environment which frees the mind, in order that it may structure ideas with a minimum of anxiety.

Teaching Business Writing

Students with a business (or related) major may not possess special insight into the writing process, but they probably have an inkling that the job market wants and needs employees who can communicate--whether orally or on paper--with a certain degree of competence and, if possible, eloquence. They therefore expect that the college business writing course will provide them with a foundation of solid, reality-oriented skills which may be applied later in various jobs. Business writing students should realize that every writing exercise, reading assignment, and peer editing session aids in the development of their cognitive, verbal, and written faculties, and that these are transferable to the world that awaits them upon graduation.

This, to me, is the challenge confronting business writing instructors. They can present examples of the ways in which an assignment or in-class exercise may be interpreted into real-world demands (for example, small group collaborative writing sessions prepare students for those occasions when they may be called upon to co-author a proposal or report). They can elicit viewpoints and helpful tips on finding and succeeding in the job market from students who have job experience or who have undergone the process of interviewing. They can present the class with a choice of subject matter relative to each assignment, so that students may determine their own audience.

All of these teaching strategies give students room to express their own experience and to write in their own "situational" environment.

It is important for instructors to recognize that business writing students frequently bring a wide range of business knowledge--whether in the form of prior job experience or previous coursework--into the classroom. The diversity of their backgrounds provides an excellent forum in which students can share their experience, while helping individuals distinguish themselves from their peers. This may result in an increased self-awareness and a sharper focus, which ultimately tests the students' commitment to their career paths and their potential within that career.

Instructors must emphasize the need for self-motivation both in and out of the classroom. They can accomplish this by establishing small editing groups which review students' first drafts of assignments without any teacher intervention (after an initial review of editing criteria); this means that students must get all of their feedback on the drafts from sources other than the instructor. Small group editing which functions in this manner compels students to rely on their own resources to elicit both audience response and ideas for revision, as well as to provide comprehensive and useful feedback stated in a diplomatic, supportive tone. Instructors can also interact with students in conference (one-to-one) situations in such a way that students are placed in the position of determining the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing, as well as ways in which it can be improved. When instructors ask questions whose function is to make students accountable for their own work, students learn to evaluate the process of communicating, and realize their own ultimate responsibility in shaping their ideas for a specific audience.

Self-motivation can also be attained in the classroom by informing students that they may revise their assignments as many times as they wish, until they are satisfied with the final product. Some students revise an assignment four or five times before they submit a final draft. Others will do one revision of each assignment and hand them all in at the end of the term (this is called "taking your chances"). In either case, students are given the option of motivating themselves to attain the highest grade which is possible for them. This establishes standards by which individuals can judge their own writing when they're out of the classroom.

Assignments should attempt to encompass as wide a range of business writing as is possible within one term (or semester). These usually include at least some of the following:

A resume and cover letter. The great majority of students will have to prepare a resume before they begin interviewing for post-graduate employment or internships. Peer and instructor evaluation can force students to evaluate their achievements and goals systematically.

A series of letters/memos. These may include: letters requesting information, letters of complaint, memos recommending a promotion (or denying one), and whatever other topics the students and instructor feel would be appropriate to their particular class.

A set of procedures. This can either take the form of describing a complex mechanism or detailing the steps involved in a process (such as assembling a stereo system). This assignment forces the writer to be concise and thorough.

A proposal which promotes a product or a service to another company. This assignment helps the student develop a professional writing style with the purpose of convincing another party to adopt the proposed plan of action.

A position paper. The subject matter may be either business--or non-business related. The objective of the position paper is to state a viewpoint in such a way that the reader is moved to agreement. This is a wonderful exercise for compelling students to state their opinions carefully and in such a way that they cannot be easily refuted--a difficult task for even the most accomplished writers.

Assignments should be accompanied by in-class preparatory exercises which help to clarify the instructor's objectives and stimulate the students to complete the assignment with enthusiasm and to the best of their abilities. Small group "interviews," collaborative writing assignments, and panel discussions are effective ways to prepare students for specific out-of-class assignments.

It is important that the individual student's context for the assignment be as close to his or her real-world experience and goals as possible. By this I mean that students should feel as much as possible that they are writing in an authentic job environment, and that their writing will be evaluated not only by "employees" at their own level, but by an "employer." It sometimes helps students to think of the instructor as the "boss," so that they can more effectively visualize their audience and focus the assignment accordingly. This creates a somewhat more realistic environment in which students may correspond (though it may be intimidating to some students who would rather distance themselves from the "real world," at least temporarily).

There is no reason why classroom activities should not include some practice in public speaking in addition to written communication, since both are essential skills in both the world within and without the university. Oral exercises can be treated as rehearsals for experiences which may eventually be demanded of students outside the classroom. In this case, the classroom provides a casual and supportive atmosphere in which students may feel free to discuss their own shortcomings and share their personal fortes with others.

Because business writing in the English department is a relatively new subject, instructors should project a demeanor which is constantly questioning, exploring, and open to suggestions from business students. After all, it is they who either have experience in, or are directed toward, the world outside the university. It is the job of business writing instructors to ensure that their needs are met, for they reflect social tendencies which we, as teachers, can no longer afford to ignore; their world is ours as well.

Sources Cited

Brusaw, Charles T., et. al. The Business Writer's Handbook. New York: St. Martins' Press, 1982.

Ewing, David W. Writing for Results. New York: John Riley and Sons, 1979.

Flower, Linda. Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1981.

Murray, Donald M. "Writing as Process, How Writing Finds Its Own Meaning." In Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition. Ed. Timothy R. Donovan and Ben W. McClelland. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1980.

Whatever Became of Writing Across the Curriculum?

Tom Jannetta
Lathrop High School

Sixteen years have passed since the pioneer British Writing Research Project, based at the University of London Institute of Education, began the composition studies which would eventually lead to publication of the Project's final report, The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18). Nearly ten years would pass before the findings of those studies would receive any wide consideration among American educators. And now, six years after the initial spate of American enthusiasm for the concepts expounded in the British report, a vast majority of American educational institutions are no closer to exploring and making use of the British findings than they were before there were any findings to explore. What became of the potentially bright prospects for "language across the curriculum" the idea Douglas Barnes claims originated with him in 1965? One possible explanation may be inferred from the fact that though nearly every teacher in Britain is at least aware of the British Writing Research Project's work (and many are quite familiar with it), only a handful of American educators know of its existence; even fewer know what it describes. Still, the question remains, why did the message of interdisciplinary writing fail to be communicated to American educators? (Or put another way, why has composition in the whole curriculum not made significant headway in American education?) The answer is readily inferred once we examine first what message was presented to teachers, and second what it meant to them.

The message of the London Projects did not really begin to be carried by American journals of education until the middle of the last decade. Initially, these articles stirred a good deal of interest and even excitement. Some journals devoted whole issues to language across the curriculum, even at times calling it Interdisciplinary English (in retrospect, surely a public relations blunder). Both the number of articles and the excitement have since dwindled. Nearly all of the reports focused on the two areas of major emphasis in the British research. The first was a large-scale study of students' writing ability as exhibited in all secondary school subjects. The second was a proposal that language policies be developed so as to encourage writing across the curriculum; this recommendation was based on the researchers' finding that writing and learning are mutually facilitating, but if mishandled can be mutually inhibiting. (How *certain kinds* of writing can inhibit learning is explained later.)

All of the articles aimed at American educators stressed the discovery aspect of composition. Invoking the name of James Britton (and, for good measure, Janet Emig) they urged the concept of writing as learning, rather than the teaching of composition *per se*. In Emig's words, "Writing represents a unique mode of learning--not merely valuable, not merely special, but unique" (1977). Closely allied with this, and an obvious consequence of it, was the recommendation that writing should be assigned in all subject areas, that, as Lee Odell says, "writing is important not just in English classes, but throughout the...curriculum" (1980). Here the distinction generally was made between composition instruction and assigning writing as a learning aid. The responsibility for the instruction was relegated to English teachers, whereas content area teachers were urged to act as respondents to student writing rather than critics of it.

These considerations led to much discussion about the design of composition assignments. Teachers were encouraged to write the same assignments they asked their students to write, thereby seeing the problems inherent in the assignments and perhaps anticipating student writers' tasks. This knowledge would then be applied in formulating directions for the writing to be assigned. Generally, the conclusion was that "the design and presentation of writing assignments...is much more important than...evaluating the finished product." (Anne Herrington, 1981). With respect to the "finished product" there was agreement that evaluation should not stress polished performance, but rather exploration of the subject and communication of the writer's ideas.

For fostering the development of writing skills, short writing assignments (300-500 words seemed agreeable to most) were favored, almost unanimously, as superior to long assignments of the term paper variety. As a sort of corollary to the increase in writing that would result from all subject area teachers giving writing assignments, frequent assignments within the various courses were also favored. The articles noted that, with few exceptions (outside of English classes), most required written work was of the so-called objective variety, including such items as multiple choice or short answer/fill-in tests. The danger in such assignments was that such limited language use limits student response to, and participation in, the material being presented as well as in the writing process.

Many of the articles had other items in common. The British group's connection between talking and writing received considerable attention. Often cited was Nancy Martin's observation that:

> Writing which is much closer to talk than most writing is at present should be encouraged right through the child's years at school--across the whole curriculum. We believe that such writing would free the writer to think in writing and to learn through using written language in the same was that he already uses talk. (1976)

Here again, the potential for the misuse of language in ways that could prove detrimental to students was pointed up by Robert Shafer: "The demand for impersonal, unexpressive writing within a subject area can actively inhibit learning" (1981). And Shafer believed this true across the curriculum:

> The functions established by the writing process are both independent of school subjects and applicable to all of them. Learning in science, for example, is facilitated by the use of "personal everyday language" which draws on "first hand experience" no less than history or English.

Attention was paid also to considerations of audience ("Writing ought to be informed by a sense of being produced for an audience which is personally felt to be interested and appreciative."--David Northcroft, 1979) and purpose--that writing should be real to students, drawing on the natural motivation to communicate as a spur to helping them approach their writing with enthusiasm [as in William Reynold's comment (1980) that, "Good writing...involves a comfortable blend of maturity, experience, motivation, and the desire to communicate."] Much space was devoted to discussing the "writing process," or rather wondering at length about what it is. Though often referred to, it was never described. The consensus was that further research in this area was needed.

The unanimity evident in the articles about writing across the curriculum is impressive. While not every article touched on all the points mentioned above, none contradicted any of them. This suggests a central paradox evident in the state of interdisciplinary writing as an educational principle and practice in America: Everyone who talks about it says it is wonderful, but hardly anyone is doing anything about it. Whereas vastly expanded programs for reading instruction have proliferated since the discovery of seemingly deplorable reading skill levels, the outcry over writing skills has not resulted in a similar expansion of writing programs. There is, to be sure, an apples-and-oranges quality to this analogy, but some contrasts are legitimate points of consideration. The effect of the composition skills panic has been to contract programs or to take them backward a few steps. Back-to-basics in composition (meaning, of course, back to traditional grammar--or at least to rhetorical forms of discourse) has meant a retreat from "new" theory, while the reading skills panic led to expanded and often innovative reading programs. Still, writing across the curriculum is ready and waiting as a progressive approach to a real problem. Much of the theoretical work has been done. Model programs have been developed and are available for copying, adaptation, even extension. There are even brave, though inaccurate, pronouncements about the proliferation of such programs, as this statement by Ann Raines suggests:

> Writing is spreading across the curriculum, and writing across the curriculum is spreading across the country...and to ensure faculty approval and involvement, faculty seminars flourish. (1980)

(Such mistaken comments are perhaps no more than failed attempts at public relations, intended to give teachers encouragement to try.) Why, then, have composition teachers failed to act? The climate is certainly right for widespread support of composition programs that can demonstrate results. Colleges howl that incoming freshman cannot write, the general public, aroused by cover stories in major news magazines, decries the state of composition skills among high school graduates, even content area teachers complain that English teachers are not teaching kids to write. And English teachers are wringing their hands, often guiltily, over what is to be done. Yet, there waits language across the curriculum; proven effective in Britain, ripe for placating finger-pointing universities and outraged parents, a chance for content area teachers to put their money where their mouths are. Why, then, has the concept not been truly "spreading across the country?"

The answer may be only somewhat simpler than the theory of an expanding universe. But it may be better understood by examing two major components of the problem. English teachers, upon whom must rest the ultimate responsibility for initiating such programs as writing across the curriculum, have not been able to garner enough support among their department colleagues to present the sort of unified front necessary to encourage and persuade content area teachers, administrators, and others that interdisciplinary writing programs should get started, let alone succeed. In addition content area teachers tend to see composition instruction as solely an English department responsibility (as do many English teachers, of course), and composition work in their subjects an intrusion on their time and subject matter (especially in the beginning stages of an interdisciplinary composition program); and many fear what is to them a new and potentially threatening area of instruction (as well as personal performance), one in which they may feel inadequate and in which their inadequacy might be exposed.

The first of these two components may be demonstrated by even the most casual survey of English teachers. Small wonder indeed that a group of professionals who cannot agree on effective content and methods by which to teach composition also cannot agree on installing composition instruction across disciplines. But we need not rely on just a casual survey. Even among those who purport to have adopted and put into effect the principles inherent in the across the curriculum philosophy of the London Projects can be found subtle but unmistakable undercurrents suggesting the same old, failed approaches decked out in new pedagogical feathers. The following series of quotations, all from articles pretending to embrace the precepts of composition across the curriculum, speak of old, musty techniques and of doubts that the new procedures can work unless they lead to traditional end products (note that the titles of the quoted essays all clearly imply or state a belief in writing across the curriculum and its corollary precepts):

> P. Jay Delmar, in an article titled "Composition and the High School: Steps Toward Faculty-Wide Involvement," suggests that students' essays "be evaluated for both content and rhetorical skills," that "reasonable mechanical correctness, sound organization, and logical support [are] important considerations in...evaluation," that "most of the major processes of exposition--persuasion, analysis, comparison-contrast, process, cause-effect, and so on--can be adapted to any subject matter [as can] outlining." Also, "instruction in the rudiments of the various expository modes should remain the responsibility of the English staff...as should instruction in revision, outlining, and usage and mechanics" (1978).
>
> Richard Leahy, in "Writing is Everybody's Business," insists that "allowing (even requiring) rewriting is not a cop-out from hard-line grading" (1979).
>
> Ann Raimes's program (described in her 1980 article, "Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum: The Experience of a Faculty Seminar") at Hunter College required that "across the curriculum,...students had to use correct grammar and syntax, express and illustrate their ideas clearly, marshal arguments, and provide evidence...[She] perceived more clearly than ever the necessity for writing teachers to make the move from personal writing to academic writing as soon in the term as possible. Students need practice in objective, logical reasoning. Academic writing is

> what college courses demand, and writing courses should include it directly and not merely by analogy and implication. We cannot trust that once students learn to write a lively personal essay they will move into a political science paper with ease."
>
> In William Reynolds' "Policy #6164," an article which begins with the statement, "Composition shall be an integral part of all subject areas of the curriculum from kindergarten through grade twelve" and expresses its "teaching goal" as "functional communication: to read and write what can be said within the children's language and social experience," he goes on to make these points: Students should "develop vocabulary,...be aware of the need for sufficient and appropriate details, reasons, examples, facts, anecdotes and the like" should learn "usage skills,...standard spelling,...capitalizing,...correct verb forms,...clear pronoun reference" and make "subjects and verbs agree." Teachers should "expose [students] to superior models of writing" and teach them "skill at combining sentences, such as coordination and subordination." Students should write "expository essays,...continue activities that develop basic writing skills,...and emulate effective writing in all fields, scientific as well as literary" (1980).
>
> In "Writing to Learn: Writing Across the Disciplines," Anne J. Herrington helpfully suggests, "If one objective of 'Introduction to United States History' is 'to see connections and contrasts between events' then a useful assignment might be to compare and contrast the goals and achievements of the Plymouth and Jamestown colonies" (1981).
>
> And Fran Lehr devotes an entire section of her 1980 article, "Writing as Learning in the Content Areas," to "A Modular Plan for Writing Research Papers." Later, toward the end of her piece she suggests teaching "comparison skills in a health class,...analysis and illustration in an art class, and...persuasion and analysis in a music class." In fact, she happily notes, "the proposed assignments can be modified to meet the needs of any class."

And there is more, all of it very old stuff wrapped in a writing across the curriculum package.

The second component of the barriers to implementing a writing across the curriculum program centers on the resistance of content area teachers, as well as administrators, the public in general, and even English teachers. A sampling of comments from the recent literature illustrates some of this resistance:

> "To many...outside of English...the responsibility for teaching students to write belongs exclusively to English departments, and these departments have generally failed miserably in meeting this responsibility." (Randall Freisinger, 1980)

> "Some members of my English Department tried to squelch the program because they feared that its success might drive them out of the composition business; others merely fretted because it meant more detested composition work, and many of them paid no attention. Some faculty members balefully pointed out that the program itself demonstrated the inadequacy of the English Department to do its job; others feared that grading written work would be too onerous for them or that giving writing instruction in content courses would cut down on the amount of content offered, and still others paid no attention." (Robert Weiss, 1979)

> "Some of this interest [in improving student writing] can be translated thus: 'Yes, student writing certainly is a problem. Why don't you people in English do something about it?'" (Lee Odell, 1980)

> "For those of us who teach in large urban colleges, the thought of faculty members eagerly giving up a summer or even a weekend to examine the problems of literacy seems an impossible dream." (Ann Raimes, 1980)

As further illustration of these comments, a survey, conducted for this article, had (perhaps predictably) bleak results. The majority of teachers asked (both English and content area teachers) agreed that writing instruction and improvement should be solely the responsibility of the English department. The runaway winners under what students should learn in composition courses were: to write term papers, business letters, and friendly (?) letters, take notes from lectures, and fill out forms necessary in everyday life. The leaders in what should be included in composition instruction were: spelling, capitalization, and punctuation; usage, such as correct verb forms, clear pronoun reference, subject-verb agreement, etc.; outlining; specific error correction; grammar, including such things as parts of speech, sentence diagramming, and the like; periodic reviews of basic writing skills; paragraph and essay organization; comparison/contrast; cause-effect; argumentation; and use of details, reasons, examples, facts, anecdotes, etc., as support. For evaluation of student writing the winners, in order, were: organization, mechanics, and content. The majority of respondents were skeptical about having an interdisciplinary writing program in their school. (The survey was conducted in two suburban Detroit high schools, one with a teaching staff of 109, the other 126, and one inner-city Detroit high school with a teaching staff of 131.)

What all of this adds up to is that the future for writing across the curriculum in America is grim. The proposals for such programs may be doomed to failure, if only because the task of developing and implementing them is monumental. Success demands coping with problems that may seem insurmountable. Perhaps the first step should be a grass roots approach--for true believers to begin within their own classrooms, incorporating writing across the curriculum themselves: to assign writing, _at appropriate times within their own course_, that reaches out into other disciplines; to solicit ideas for such writing from content-area teachers; and to perhaps even arrange for students to receive credit for such work in both classes.

The next step then would be to involve others who had become interested from the results of such a grass roots approach, acquainting them with the principles and procedures necessary to build a valid program. Obstacles here would include the lack of irrefutable, "hard" evidence that the principles will work. (Perhaps, as the reading specialists did with their programs, we will need to determine what the interdisciplinary writing program _will_ accomplish and then set those accomplishments as the criteria for proof of our program's success.) The next hurdle would likely be the scope of the program. Half-hearted attempts would invite failure, since the possibility would always exist in such a program that any random and haphazard composition work that was done in areas outside the program might be regressive and thereby defeating to our aims. A complete, across the curriculum program would, of course, require cooperation from all involved (notice how each problem seems to make the previous one appear minor by comparison). And, of course there will always be those who will not want interdisciplinary writing to succeed, and they will often be in positions to help it fail (not the least among these will be some English teachers who see such a program as job-threatening).

In spite of all this, writing across the curriculum should be given a better trial than it has been given thus far. Though there is much work still to be done, especially research into the nature and characteristics of the composing process, enough has been done to suggest that the writing-to-learn program incorporating all subject areas is the right way to go. If, as David Hamilton says in "Interdisciplinary Writing," "Writing is everywhere, like breathing, like God." then the schools must begin to work with this universality, making it a linchpin of _all_ programs. It has been demonstrated that writing enhances learning; we should proceed under the assumption that writing also enhances teaching.

Sources Cited

Applebee, Arthur. "Writing Across the Curriculum: The London Projects." English Journal (Dec. 1977), pgs. 81-5.

Delmar, P. Jay. "Composition and the High School: Steps Toward Faculty-Wide Involvement." English Journal (Nov. 1978), pgs. 36-8.

Emig, Janet. "Writing as a Mode of Learning." College Composition and Communication (May 1977), pgs. 122-28.

Freisinger, Randall. "Cross-Disciplinary Writing Workshops: Theory and Practice." College English (Oct. 1980), pgs. 154-166.

Hamilton, David. "Interdisciplinary Writing." College English (March 1980), pgs. 780-93.

Herrington, Anne. "Writing to Learn: Writing Across the Disciplines." College English (April 1981), pgs. 379-87.

Jacobs, Suzanne. "Writing Across the Curriculum: An Update." English Journal (Nov. 1978), pgs. 64-67.

Leahy, Richard. "Writing is Everybody's Business." Improving College and University Teaching (Spr. 1978), pg. 50.

Martin, Nancy, et. al. Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum 11-16. London: Ward Lock, 1976, pg. 60.

Northcroft, David. "Pupils' Writing: Product, Process and Evaluation." English in Education (Sum. 1979), pgs. 7-18.

Odell, Lee. "The Process of Writing and the Process of Learning." CCCC (Feb. 1980), pgs. 42-9.

Raimes, Ann. "Writing and Learning Across the Curriculum: The Experience of a Faculty Seminar." College English (March 1980), pgs. 797-801.

Reynolds, William. "The Language Game: Policy #6146." English Journal (Sept. 1980), pgs. 83-85.

Rosen, Lois. "An Interview with James Britton, Tony Burgess, and Harold Rosen." English Journal (Nov. 1978), pgs. 50-8.

Scheffler, Judith. "Composition with Content: An Interdisciplinary Approach." CCCC (Feb. 1980), pgs. 51-57.

Shafer, Robert. "A British Proposal for Improving Literacy." Educational Forum (Fall 1981), pgs. 81-96.

Weiss, Robert. "The Humanity of Writing: A Cross-Disciplinary Program." Improving College and University Teaching (Fall 1979), pgs. 144-147.

A Question of Balance: The Conference and the Workshop

Carol Hale Doty
Michigan State University

My first term as a graduate assistant introduced me to the conference method of teaching composition. At the time, I knew nothing of such an approach--not even by name. Prompted by a general insecurity about my ability to teach writing, I came up with a course design which was largely student-centered. It was easier for me to work with individual writers, so that consideration provided the basis of my class structure. Students worked in pairs on rough drafts and final copies, while I circulated in the classroom, checking for problems or questions, reading bits of papers and making suggestions. Only on days when I made assignments did the class work as a whole. Discussions were used to help focus the assignment and to suggest various options for handling it. By the end of the term, I saw a great deal of improvement in many of the writers, notably a couple of students who at the beginning of the term had demonstrated real mental blocks toward writing. Student evaluations of the course were largely positive. I was bothered, though, that some students had found the class boring, the very thing I had been afraid of--because I had felt it myself.

In my second term, encouraged by experience and inspired by some methods I'd seen used by a more dynamic TA, I took charge. Using our department's customary pattern for the writing workshop that I teach, I required two or three students each week to copy their papers for the entire class. Discussions followed in which strengths and weaknesses of the writing were emphasized. (After my first term I had learned not to ask students to look for grammatical or mechanical errors.) Most days this system worked very well, involving the students in animated dialogue. At the end of the term I felt very encouraged about my progress toward becoming a dynamic TA in my own right. My class had certainly not been boring. There was only one problem: as winter term came to a close, I did not find the same improvement I had seen in my fall term writers, expecially the students who had serious difficulty with expressing themselves on paper.

Troubled by the relative dullness of my first term class, which none the less saw greater writing improvement than the subsequent more exciting class, I sought out my faculty advisor. He assured me in a very supportive manner that I had run my fall class in a legitimate fashion. Not only was my method acceptable, it also had a name. "What you've been using," he told me, "is the conference-centered approach." Relieved by the existence of a label, I was still faced with the difficulty of achieving a balance between the interest, excitement, and participation of the workshop method and the individual improvement that seems to result naturally from the attention an instructor can give in a conference-centered course. With this conflict in mind, I consulted current research.

Conference-centered teaching has been a popular method since the late sixties. One of its well-known proponents is Donald M. Murray of the University of New Hampshire. In an article he wrote with Lester A. Fisher he outlines the conference method as he and colleagues have employed it at U.N.H. (1973). Brief conferences, he says, should be held every week. Papers should be read for the first time in conference and commented on orally, not pre-read with already written comments. Many instructors find this threatening, but Murray claims it is invaluable for the students, who observe and participate in the evaluation of their own writing. As anyone who has been involved in an independent study knows, there is no hiding in such one-on-one meetings. Each student must respond, and the instructor must respond to each student: the student cannot sit in the back and hope to be ignored, nor can the instructor avoid the problem student. The conference method virtually guarantees participation.

Barbara Fassler discusses her concern with the traditional method of evaluating student papers:

> The student hands in a paper. The teacher then withdraws with the paper into some secret place where, by a process mysterious to the student, he arrives at a grade and jots some comments on the paper in red ink. A few days later the paper comes back to the student as one of a whole pile handed back in class. Anxiously...the student receives the judgment. A poor grade on the paper is as indelible as a stone hieroglyph.....The only chance to improve the mark is to do better on the next assignment, but many a student finds it difficult to believe that the teacher's comments on this essay will be very relevant to the varied and perplexing errors sure to sabotage her next paper. (1978)

If the student does not have a clear understanding of the writing process, this enigmatic system of evaluation only confuses him or her further. The whole affair thus is shrouded in mystery; little wonder that students often despair of learning these Elysian secrets.

Fassler describes several benefits of the conference method. The amount of response an instructor can give orally in a twenty minute meeting is far greater and is more effective than the feedback one can write in the same time period. It simply uses the time more efficiently. The personal exchange of a conference also speaks in its favor; meeting one-on-one is more interesting and more conducive to a relaxed relationship. Probably the most important benefit is the unveiling of the evaluation process. Students are directly involved in the act of a reader reacting to their writing. The concept of audience is made real:

> If the teacher is skillful at sharing the ongoing evaluative process, the student will be an eyewitness to the ways in which clumsy sentences make the reader stumble, generalities make him yawn, jerky transitions throw her off the trail, and improper punctuation forces his eye to backtrack. Thereafter, as a student writes a paper, his or her nightmares should picture not the red ink marks which will stab each error but rather the real life reader, to whom an idea must be communicated, and who must be led on smoothly from thought to thought, without muddles, derailings, or backups.

In contrast to the traditional method, conference-based evaluation provides a much more active role for both instructor and student, allowing for growth through interaction.

Writings about the conference method often share an affinity with Murray's and Fassler's articles. Mary P. Hiatt takes a different view, pointing out that conferences should not be considered a panacea; that they could in fact be detrimental to some students (1975). The example she uses is that of the student who has "always" done poorly in English classes. Such a student is likely, she says, to turn a defensive deaf ear to the instructor's comments, which may well be perceived as attempts at confrontation. Hiatt's article is a useful perspective, presenting ideas that should be considered by instructors using the conference method. Any teacher who holds conferences with students presumably does so, in part at least, to effect better communication; care should be taken that alienation is not the result. As Hiatt states:

> If we wish students not to be at bay, if we wish individual student-teacher meetings to be truly helpful, we must make sure we are getting through. Sympathy is not enough; being patient is not enough; general encouragement is not enough. We must be able to translate our concepts in some intelligible fashion, for all too often these concepts comfort only ourselves, not our students.

> Difficult though it may be for us, we must be able to give simpler and more cogent explanations and no longer presume that most of our students do understand our terminology. We should, moreover, use conference time to explore, through questions, precisely what the areas of misunderstanding are.

Hiatt's point is well-taken; there is yet another area of the student-instructor exchange that requires demystification. She also shows that the conference can either aid or obstruct this process of clarification. Conferences alone are not the answer. Instructor sensitivity to student needs is a prerequisite of any effective teaching model.

After reviewing the literature about conference-centered teaching, I decided to find out what students who take, and instructors who teach, courses using conferences have to say. Drawing up two questionnaires, I passed them out to my colleagues and their students. Ten teaching assistants and sixty student writers responded to the following questionnaires.

INSTRUCTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What benefits do you see coming from conference meetings with students? Are the benefits academic or personal? That is, are any benefits influential in the writing process of a particular student, or is the benefit mainly in increased contact with a student, making a more comfortable relationship?

2. Would your students' progress suffer if you did not hold conferences? Why or why not? In what ways?

3. Compare the relative value of conferences to in-class work. Are the two best used in a balanced approach? Is one or the other satisfactory alone? Which should receive more attention?

4. Do you perceive weaknesses in the conference-centered approach? If so, describe them as specifically as possible.

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What value do you see in meeting with your instructor? If you could choose, would you meet more frequently? Not at all?

2. Are you helped in your writing by these meetings? In what ways? If not, how could such conferences better meet your needs as a writer?

3. Which is of more help to you, conferences or peer-group

editing? Do you prefer one to the other? Why?

I think I could have predicted many of the responses. Instructors saw the benefits of conferences as both academic and personal. The academic pluses involved things like helping students understand course goals, encouraging questions, and clarifying instructor responses. Student perceptions of personal benefits were focused on the relaxed, more open relationship that conferences can provide. Conferences also seem to give rise to the nurturing aspect of teaching, as the instructor may more clearly see the individual student's needs and so shape appropriate responses.

All but two of the instructors felt sure that student progress would suffer without conferences. They saw conferences as necessary to inspire the students to work harder and to revise more often, Misunderstandings, they said, are less likely to occur in the open communication that is encouraged by conference meetings. One of the dissenting instructors conceded that at least some would suffer without conferences "because they would concentrate either only on the negative written comments, or, conversely, on the positive. My emphasis can be more clear, yet more humane, in person."

The majority preferred a balanced approach between workshop and conference. One instructor said she liked the workshop because she felt that it encouraged independence in the students' understanding of their writing processes. Another commented, "I would never teach conference-style without classes; I would teach workshop-style without conferences. Instructor comments should always receive less attention than peer responses (to the extent that the instructor's course design can control that attention)."

All of the respondents listed weaknesses in the conference-centered approach, or warnings and restrictions on its use. One instructor felt that conference efficiency would be weakened if teachers failed to ask pertinent writing-centered questions. A weakness involving personal versus academic benefit appears in the possibility of allowing a student's personal problems to overshadow any problems with writing. The instructor could become too personally close to the student, to the point that an objective evaluation would no longer be possible. From another perspective, the student may develop an unhealthy dependence on the instructor's opinion. Used alone, the conference method offers only a single reaction to the student's writing. This of course encourages reliance on the instructor, in addition to limiting or warping the student's perception of audience. As one TA put it, "the student is depending too much on the vision of a single reader, and the fact that that reader is The Teacher seems problematical to me."

Students were unanimously positive about the value of meeting with their instructors. Understandably, in a large university, they were very happy about getting personal attention from a teacher. The fact that an instructor cares enough about a student's progress to sit down and talk it over seems to mean a great deal. Certainly teachers should take advantage of this positive influence to get student writers personally caught up in their composing process. The confidentiality of the conference, and the immediacy of the instructor's response, were both mentioned frequently as positive factors. Almost all of the students found spoken criticism easier to understand and follow than its written counterpart. One distressing but not surprising answer appeared often--the need to "find out what the teacher wants," the implication being "so I can write what the teacher wants to hear." The majority of students said they would like to meet more often with their teachers, some stipulating that such meetings should not, however, subtract from class time.

When I asked students about the actual help received in conferences, many of them echoed instructor responses. They often mentioned such ideas as "opportunity to ask questions; and "teacher's expectations are clearer." Frequently, students mentioned getting advice from a specialist, or some variation on that theme. An emphasis on personal benefits also appeared here, as "it gives confidence and moral support" and "feeling comfortable with the instructor makes writing easier" were very common responses.

The most revealing, and I think potentially useful, information is contained in the answers students gave to the fourth question, concerning their preference for peer-editing or conferences. Only four of the sixty respondents said they preferred peer-editing. The variety of opinions offered in peer-group work was frequently mentioned in its support. One student specified that the peer opinions seemed more like suggestions, not requirements--a reflection of how some students view teacher comments. One student said he really liked working in peer groups because it gave him an indication of where he ranked in the class.

Eighteen of the sixty said they found both peer-editing and conferences to be helpful. The comparisons students made between the two are sometimes enlightening. For example, one student said that the peer group was good for just listening to her, but the TA was the critic. Does this indicate her perception is that the instructor doesn't listen to her? Another telling response: peers were helpful in indicating when ideas were effectively communicated, and the TA helped with the fine points (read grammar and spelling).

Thirty-six of sixty chose conferencing over peer-editing, and the reasons they gave are especially significant. I believe these responses deserve careful thought and demand consequent action. Students in this group by and large presented a very negative view of their peers as editors and writers. Some mild statements reflected only that fellow students were not sure enough of themselves as editors; that they were too nice or worried about hurt feelings. Some said their peers didn't take the process seriously enough for their comments to be of use. Occasionally a student was more blunt. "Student editing does not help me in any way," or "I wouldn't want someone with my 'talent' correcting my paper." Certainly the harshest statement to come from the questionnaire was this: "It's difficult to criticize or be criticized by a 'peer' that writes at a fifth grade level. Peer group editing is a miserable waste of time." Giving further weight to this viewpoint is an extreme amount of belief in the teacher's opinion. Over and over again, students refer to the instructor as qualified, knowledgeable, a pro, one who has the right answer. Their faith rests with us, and if we as teachers fail to discourage this short-sighted attitude, we are doing our students a great disservice. We must convince them of the validity of a balanced approach which incorporates both conferences and peer-editing; which encourages trust not only in us, but also in themselves and their peers. They for the most part accept our opinions with ease; we must build their faith in their own and their peer's critical faculties.

As I compiled the answers to my questionnaires, I grew troubled by some of the patterns I saw forming and I made two decisions to help ease my anxiety. First, I sketched out four plans to address the problems. Second, I returned to the students for further clarification. I will discuss my questions and their responses presently, but I want now to describe the class structures I came up with. In my opinion it is both possible and necessary to create writing courses which make use of conferences and workshops. While many of the conference camp make claims for conferences alone as satisfactory, I believe that students lose out on some important exchanges when their only audience, their only evaluator, is the instructor. The following plans employ workshops and conferences in various ways.

I. The first course set-up keeps peer interaction at a minimum, emphasizing instead individual activities. Students work in pairs on rough and final drafts. The instructor attends rough draft editing sessions, making it a point to check with each pair of students for questions or problems. Discussion of assignments and writing in general constitute the only all-class activities. The teacher holds a thirty minute mid-term conference for each student, discussing progress and problems in writing. Students receive written commentary on papers as well as more detailed explanation in class. If a longer conference seems necessary for further explanation, one may be set up at this time.

II. Class design here is largely peer-group oriented, with three or four students working on rough and final drafts. As in plan I, the teacher is available during the rough draft stage and checks with each group of students. All-class work involves both discussion of assignments and whole-class critiques of student writing. Each student meets with the instructor at mid-term and end-of-term conferences; additional meetings may be scheduled throughout the term at either the student's or the instructor's request. The instructor evaluates papers at home as in plan I.

III. The third class design attempts a more balanced approach. Peer group work alternates between groups of four on rough drafts and pairs on final copies. The teacher remains available during rough draft editing. All-class work follows the same procedure as plan II. There are no mid-term or end-of-term conferences; rather, on the day final copies are turned in, students bring them to the teacher for an immediate oral evaluation. The teacher spends approximately twenty minutes on each paper; obviously, for a large class this might require staggering the days when papers are due. These conferences do not take the place of the regular course meeting.

IV. In the fourth class design, the emphasis falls strongly on the writing process. Students work alone writing their rough drafts in class, and as the rest of the class writes, the teacher works with individual students. All-class work functions as a colloquium in which selected students each week discuss how they wrote their papers, changes made from rough draft to final copy, and the reasoning behind some of the changes. In this way I believe students would develop a better understanding of the writing process as well as more respect for their peers. In addition to mini-conferences during rough draft editing, the teacher sees each student at mid-term and end-of-term for evaluations. These meetings should be planned so that a paper falls due at each and students have the chance to see the instructor evaluate their papers. Otherwise during the term, the teacher checks papers at home and returns them in class. With a stronger emphasis on peer evaluation and at least two chances during the term to see the instructor's methods of evaluating writing, students should not feel threatened by papers handled in the more traditional manner.

I have combined the various elements of the course structures in ways that seem good to me; of course, any of them could be interchanged. The basic components involved are (1) peer group work--how many students will work together, and at what stages? (2) when will the teacher be available for interaction in the process? (3) what role does all-class work have? (4) how many conferences will be held? for how long? at what points in the term? and (5) when will student writing be evaluated? will students be involved in the evaluation process? It seems to me that instructors may choose any combination or any emphasis for these class structures, according to their personal priorities and perception of the needs of any particular group of students.

The strong negative reaction to peer-group editing troubled me greatly and I decided to return to my students for a further response. Toward the end of a class session, I told them about the results of the questionnaire I'd given out and then asked them to write for fifteen minutes on their view of peer-editing and why they thought the consensus was so strongly against it. I also explained how a totally conference-centered class was set up and asked if they thought they would like to take such a class. Following are some of the responses I received:

"I like the peer editing, and I couldn't imagine this class without it, and I don't think it would be as good of a class without peer editing. I would not like the class with just conferences. I think that the combination of peer editing and conferences is good. But I really believe that these students need to learn how to critique others' writing." This young woman wrote the most positive statement about peer editing. Additionally, she offered four suggestions for general improvement that reflected a concern for a class which would balance the two methods. I was encouraged by her suggestions and her affirmation of peer editing.

"Peer editing seems to have a poor reputation as a tool for improvement in writing. I think this has to do with the quality of education which has been imparted to us from the first day of kindergarten. There has been a furor over 'why Johnny can't read or write' for some time now. It seems that under the present system, those who can, learn, and those who can't, must fumble along. Watching the ones who can't all those years has bred...actual disrespect. How can you gain anything from someone else's opinion on what you write if you don't respect them? I think that is the basic problem--too many of us think our peers really aren't our peers because they don't know anything." My only consolation is that at least this student offered some reasons why this disrespect, which was so apparent in many of the responses, has such a widespread existance. A final comment that she made, however, disturbed me. "If nothing else," she said, "it teaches something about communication." Perhaps this touches on the real problem here: students in writing courses very often do not see their writing as a form of communication, nor do they perceive their fellow-students as an audience. So we teachers must attempt to show them that not only are they communicating when they write, but also that their peers are a valuable audience for their ideas.

One potentially hopeful response was the following: "In a conference with the teacher you have two people relating to each other on a one-to-one basis. Ideas can be exchanged, new perspectives introduced, compliments, criticism, etc. Peer editing isn't bad in itself. I believe that all the above things listed about conferences should carry over to group editing." I was encouraged to hear a student saying that under the best circumstances peer editing could be as helpful as conferences. I believe that this will be the case when students are shown that peers' opinions are valuable.

Another area which cries out for attention is the lack of standards for writing evaluation. Students, unsure of their own abilities as editors, are often confused by the variety of opinions they receive in a workshop:

> "The people who critique my paper have different opinions and different views from one another, and from you. The grammatical errors are usually spotted but the rest of the writing seems to be critiqued to the person's mood at that time. I get confused and frustrated when someone has said they particularly liked a segment of my paper and then when someone else says, explain, this doesn't make sense. Whose opinion am I to follow?"

I think that helping students understand the writing process and aiding their development as editors through peer evaluation sessions will ultimately take care of this problem. Specifically, I believe that a course following design number IV would contribute substantially toward improving the reputation of peer editing. As students voice and hear others voice their specific composing activities, they will develop more assurance about themselves and their peers as writers. I think the colloquium would promote a more responsible involvement in a composition course.

One statement demonstrated the overwhelming influence created by years of bad experiences with grammar classes. "The reason that I hate peer group editing is that I feel like I am not qualified to judge other people's work. My English background is very poor and I don't feel that I can correct other people's grammar. I can only tell them how I feel about their ideas and how their paper sounds to me." The low self-esteem here both touched and frustrated me. This remark came at the end of a term in which I had frequently stressed that in peer evaluations students should critique for strengths, weaknesses, and communication of ideas--not grammar. I would be a very happy teacher if all of my students would at least tell how they feel about someone else's writing and how the paper sounds to them.

The final responses I chose speak all too eloquently of the extent of the teacher's influence:

> "We have to compete for the grade from the instructor. Therefore, his opinion is, in a sense, the only opinion. We haven't got the time to worry what our peers think of our work. We only have the time to strive for improvement in the eyes of the instructor."

> "Being the instructor does assign the grade, I feel this has some influence on the paper's content. I found that while writing my revisions, I would write to change the paper to please the grader rather than the audience."

> "The main reason I like to have my paper critiqued by the instructor is because I know what they're looking for, so that when they read your paper, it's what 'they want to hear.'"

> "...as bad as it may sound, the instructor is the one giving the grade in the end, so it doesn't really matter if the rest of the class critiques the paper."

Frustrated, disturbed, puzzled--these students with their honest answers provided me with hours of troubled thought. As I began to consider their statements, I realized that several new questions had been raised for me. For all of us. They represent a challenge, and we must meet it. What does the negative reaction to peer editing indicate about students' self-images? How does this affect the way they view themselves as writers? How should teachers respond? How does the concept of the teacher's authoritative voice contribute to this first problem? In what ways do teachers perpetuate this? Is it possible to do otherwise in an educational system which demands, ultimately, that we give a grade to each student? How can teachers convince students of the validity of their own and their peers' opinions? How do we explain the highly subjective nature of writing evaluation? Are teachers too motivated by vested interests to be willing to encourage independence in their students? What should the teacher's role be in a composition course? In the writing process of any single student?

A colleague, upon reading the final draft of this paper, gave the following response to the issues I have raised.

> These are the conflicts that must be foremost in our minds as we plan, organize, and teach--especially teach--every course, every class session. The words

> we use, the explanations we offer, the illustrations we make, the gestures we employ, the way we suggest solutions to (not answer) student questions, the way we guide (not correct or mandate) student workshops--all of these signals tell the student what we think of ourselves, of him, of his work--and, by implication, what he should think of these as well. If our responsibility is not present always in our minds as we teach, we will be condemned to passing on to our students the same bigoted notions of teacher authority and judgment. What we are really talking about here is raising consciousness.

This reaction is heartening, for it assures me that I am by no means alone is seeing a need for change in the ways we interact with our students. Teaching is nurturing--promoting growth and development in our charges. Because of the communicative, expressive nature of writing, composition teachers have a unique opportunity--indeed, a responsibility--to encourage this maturation.

I hope we will do just that.

Sources Cited

Carnicelli, Thomas. "The Writing Conference: A One-to-One Conversation." In Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition. NCTE, 1980.

Duke, Charles. "The Student-Centered Conference and the Writing Process." English Journal, 64 (1975), pgs. 44-7.

Fassler, Barbara. "The Red Pen Revisted: Teaching Composition Through Student Conferences." College English, 40 (1978), pgs. 186-190.

Fisher, Lester and Donald Murray. "Perhaps the Professor Should Cut Class." College English, 35 (1973), pgs. 169-73.

Hiatt, Mary P. "Students at Bay: The Myth of the Conference." CCCC, 26 (1975), pgs. 38-41.

Murray, Donald. "The Listening Eye: Reflections on the Writing Conference." College English, 41 (1979), pgs. 13-18.

Schiff, Peter. "Revising the Writing Conference." CCCC, 29 (1978), pgs. 294-296.

Effective Conferencing Within the Writing Process

Celeste Resh
Michigan State University

> "Conferences, a process approach, and a resonable set of priorities--that is my full definition of the conference method." --Thomas Carnicelli

The one-on-one conference between writing teacher and student has recently been promoted as an essential part of the writing course. Whether it occurs once a term or once a week, the purpose of the conference is to provide writers with individual attention directed toward further development of their writing ability. Charles R. Duke sees the student-centered conference as playing "an important role both in reducing repetition of mistakes and also in establishing a better environment for developing skills in writing" (1975). Anthony Petrosky and James Brozick stress conference use as an "intervention strategy that helps writers to see alternatives, to make decisions based on knowledgeable feedback, and to engage in an intelligent discussion about their writing" (1979). Few writing instructors would deny that these accomplishments are important, but more wonder how much can actually be achieved in the limited time available for conferencing. Thomas Carnicelli believes successful conferences result from using a particular conference method--conferences, a process approach, and a set of priorities for looking at writing (1980). Convinced that this approach was valid, I searched for a method of incorporating it into my writing class with no significant increase in contact time required beyond the usual. After a good deal of reading, thought, and experimentation, I have found a conference method that meets my requirements of efficiency and effectiveness. In presenting it here, I hope to provide interested writing instructors with enough options to enable them to incorporate a similar method within their own writing courses.

The requirement of efficiency, that is, no increased expenditure of time, calls for a broader look at the range of possibilities for conferencing. Conferences can take place both in and out of class. In-class conferences need not necessarily disrupt peer group work, and out-of-class conferences do not have to take any more time than that set aside for regular conference hours. The traditional nature of the conference, one-on-one between teacher and student, will be re-examined and combinations will be considered that may increase efficient use of the conference without losing effectiveness. If the class structure is to be maintained, and out-of-class conference time cannot be expanded beyond the usual office hours yet more conferencing is desired, new ideas must be entertained. In terms of sustaining or enhancing the effectiveness of the conference, I will suggest uses within the writing process approach and recommend a system of priorities for looking at writing. It is my hope that these suggestions will aid the writing instructor who would prefer a more personal approach but finds any additional conferencing within the current method too overwhelming.

In search of some kind of organization within which to display the variables from which the conference method most suitable can be selected, I have settled on journalism's old standard, the five W's and H. At the risk of seeming too pat, I believe an efficient, effective conference plan can result with a careful combination of the elements from each of the areas I have identified as necessary for successful conferencing.

WHO CONFERS, AND WHEN?

Who's going to confer? Usually it has been the teacher and one student meeting when the teacher has scheduled a required out-of-class conference. Carnicelli points out that this meeting can also take place in the classroom. Some instructors do not see that as a possibility since they worry that such a format might affect class structure. In addition, class time does not afford more than a cursory moment on each student's paper in the usual class of 20 or more students. Obviously, time available must be taken into consideration along with the reason for conferring and where the student is in the writing process. Options for conferencing include Teacher/1 Student, Teacher/2 Students, and Teacher/3 Students.

Teacher/1 Student: This combination is the one used by the majority of instructors and most agree that it has not been used effectively. Part of the reason is because no one can imagine meeting with every student every week, in addition to meeting during regular class hours each week. It is possible, though, to meet every other week outside of class, for a few minutes per student, without using much time beyond the instructor's usual office hours. The reduction from, say, a half hour conference used in the one-meeting-a-term method would not be a problem since the one-on-one contact time is more than doubled by meeting every other week. Also reduced is the pressure that occurs when an instructor tries to cover as much as possible in the once-a-term meeting because it will probably be the only chance to provide that kind of attention. An additional bonus is the opportunity to follow up on discussion and decisions made in previous conferences.

Teacher/2 Students: Using this method in concert with the one-on-one method can provide personal contact with each student each week. Although time is limited, 3-5 minutes per student, 11 students per class can be visited. The instructor will not only be providing personal attention to the paper's author, but also serving as a model for the student who is looking on. Eventually, as Petrosky and Brozick suggest, the model provided will result in Student/Student conferences that promote self-learning. Carnicelli suggests that this in-class conferring can be done without having read the paper in advance, but this is a technique that can be overwhelming at first. Since many instructors place some importance on written comments, they may wish to read the papers prior to both in- and out-of-class conferences and put their comments in writing. By contrast, Charles Duke sees the unrehearsed approach as a way of lessening the sense of intimidation a student feels upon first discussing a paper. A compromise may be found in the Teacher/3 Students conference where everyone, including the teacher, is hearing the paper for the first time.

Teacher/3 Students: The small group of 3-4 students seems to work best when it functions as an audience for the initial reading of the paper rather than during the revision process where groups of two seem to work better. In any case, visiting each of the groups as the papers are read may not be considered a form of conferencing but there is no reason it can't be used that way. The teacher can help the group focus on particular aspects of the paper being read. Questions focusing on content and audience are appropriate at this time and the teacher's example provides the group with a model to use as they discuss the rest of the papers on their own. Most instructors will agree that this form of instruction is more effective in small groups than with the entire class. Focusing on one paper per group not only provides a model with something of immediate concern to the group but also gives a few minutes of the teacher's personal attention to one member of the group; it is the quality of the time given, not necessarily the quantity, that matters most. In conferring with students in small groups, it is important to have a plan and be direct and to the point--this will provide efficient help for the individual writer as well as set an example for group interaction without the teacher in attendance.

WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES?

This refers to the priorities used in discussing student work and it includes the approach--directive or non-directive. Charles Duke discusses these approaches from a Rogerian counseling point of view. He says the directive approach is the manner in which student writing has been treated for years--a didactic and prescriptive method which assumes the teacher would identify the problems and prescribe the solutions. In the teaching of writing, the non-directive approach operates on the assumption that writers are able to identify and solve their own problems if the instructor will use some of the strategies of non-directive counseling. Duke lists the devices of focusing, clarifying, using acceptance and approval words, using reassurance phrasing, and providing non-directive leads.

"Focusing" is the selection of a priority, making clear to the students that they have a specific task to work on. With this specific focus, students are given a sense of security in knowing the explicit objective of the conference. "Clarification" is simply re-interpreting what the students say in order to show them their efforts are understood and appreciated. "Words of acceptance" demonstrate comprehension by the teacher ("Yes" "I see"), and "approval words" indicate agreement ("Good" "That's right"). "Reassurance phrasing" is useful to show that the students are not alone in their feelings ("I know..." "Yes, I've had that same..."). "Providing non-directive leads" helps students to examine their writing on their own and talk about it ("Which of these paragraphs do you like best?" "Could this section be stated in another way?" "What seems to be giving you the most difficulty?"). Duke suggests that the questions should be as open-ended as possible to encourage students to be responsible for discussing their work. This method of conferring, according to Duke, can take as little time as a few minutes if the instructor follows the principle of concentrating only on the major problem of the moment--which would be determined according to a list of priorities.

In an early experiment in conferencing, Lester Fisher and Donald Murray suggest that "perhaps the professor should cut class" (1973). This suggestion resulted from their discovery that their students were not only capable of diagnosing a key writing problem, but also capable of suggesting a solution. They found that frequently the teacher's most important function was to help students discover their strengths since they were usually more adept at spotting a weakness. Of course, as the paper comes closer to the final draft, the directive mode can be entirely appropriate for dealing with word choice or mechanical problems.

Suzanne Jacobs and Adela Karliner explain, in "Helping Writers to Think," that the stance of the instructor should be variable--from friendly authoritarian to fellow conversationalist to recorder of student ideas--depending upon what is needed by the student and the writing product (1977). What is needed should be determined according to a reasonable set of teaching priorities, according to Carnicelli. He uses and recommends a list provided by Roger Garrison and, having used it myself, so do I.

1. Content (ideas and information): Is it worth writing about? Are the ideas developed enough, not enough? etc.
2. Point of View (purpose, persona, audience): Is the tone appropriate to the purpose of the paper?
3. Organization: Is the ordering of ideas the most appropriate method for conveying this information to the reader? Smooth development of paragraphs, transitions? Appropriate introduction and conclusion? etc.
4. Style (diction and syntax): Does the writing seem natural, honest? Cliches, wordiness, inaccurate word choices? Suitable sentence variation? etc.
5. Mechanics (grammar, punctuation, spelling).

Obviously, content and point of view must be considered early in the writing process, and other priorities follow as the work progresses toward a final draft.

WHERE IS THE WRITER IN THE WRITING PROCESS?

Where the writer is in the writing process will determine most of the other factors. In prewriting, general discussion of possible directions may take place in small groups of two to four students. Here, conferencing may simply be a few minutes devoted to those group members who most need attention and aid in focusing on a topic. During the first draft reading in class, the Teacher/3 Students method described earlier can be used to work through the priority list as the writing requires. For those instructors who grade papers during the term instead of waiting for the portfolio at the end, it may be desirable to return the papers during a one-on-one conference if assessment of the graded paper can be directed toward future writing. No matter where the student is in the writing process, however, the Teacher/1 Student conference outside of class every other week can assist student self-learning if it is structured according to a reasonable system of priorities.

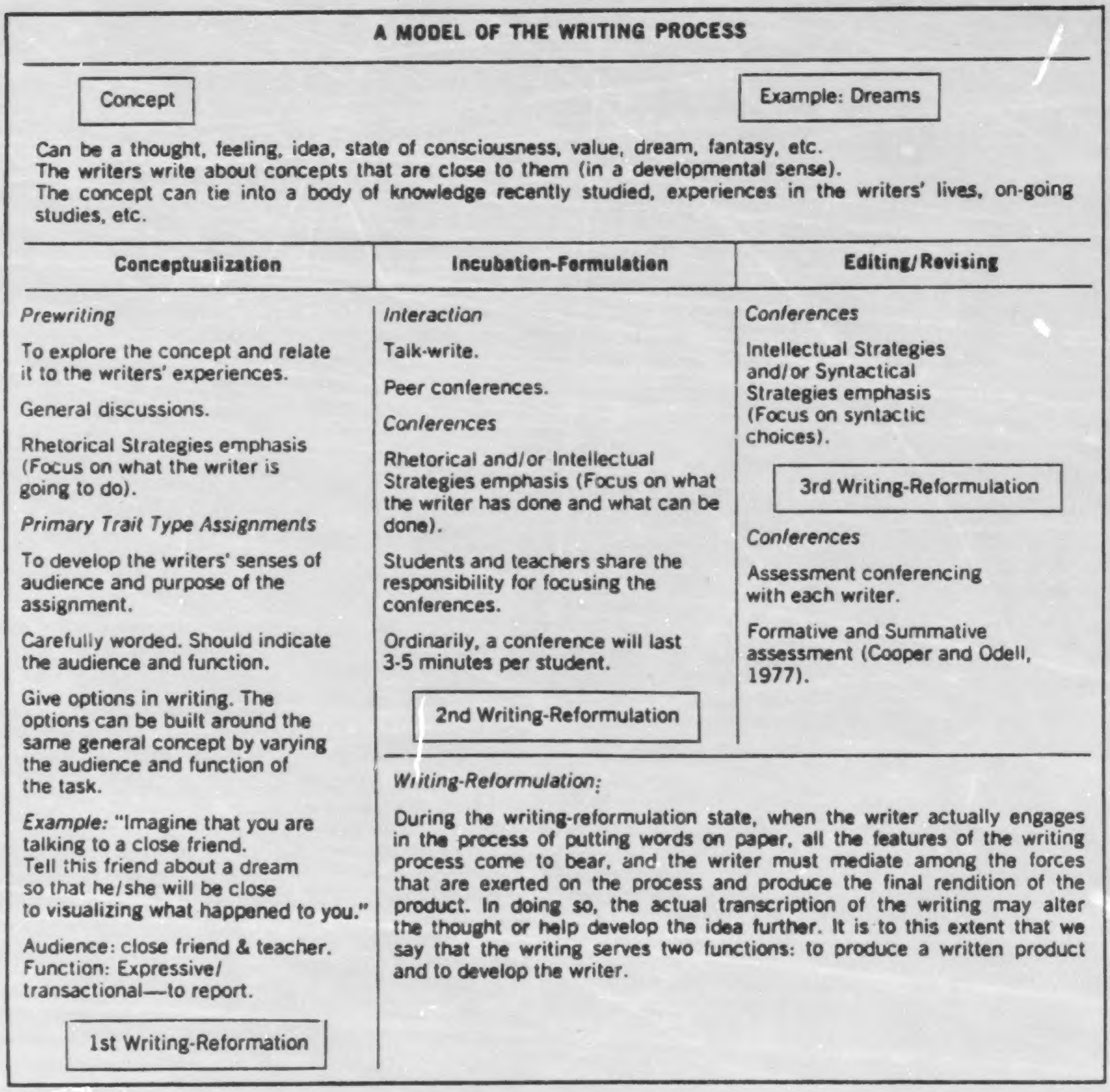
WHY CONFER?

Why meet--aside from the fact that Jane signed her name on the appointment calendar for 2:00 p.m.? Does Jane have any idea why she's coming in? Some kind of preparation for this conference is necessary in order to derive a feeling of mutual accomplishment beyond establishing a rapport. A meeting during the early stages of the paper requires consideration of the approach to be taken--probably non-directive. At any stage of the writing process, it is best if the student is asked to come with questions. If it is agreed that writing is a process of thinking things through, then it doesn't seem unfair to request the writer to think about the writing prior to talking about it with the instructor. Even the carefully thought out non-directive approach can fail if the answer to all the questions is, "I don't know" because Jane has not received a hint about the conference's purpose. Rather, the teacher can supply some general non-directive questions prior to the conference and ask the students to come with questions of their own. Of course, it will be helpful to keep in mind Charles Duke's principle: concentrate on the major problem of the moment, according to your list of priorities. Overwhelming writers with every problem at once can cause them to lose track of what is really important and this kind of confusion may also lead to the loss of rapport that instructors hope to establish in one-on-one conferencing.

HOW TO INCORPORATE MORE EFFECTIVE CONFERENCING

Where the writer is in the writing process and why a conference is being held determines what is talked about with whom and when. As pat as this sounds, I believe that attention to each of these aspects will produce effective conferencing. The final question is: How can this system be incorporated into the current format without a substantial increase in contact time per week? The answer to this for the Teacher/1 Student conference is provided in the WHO/WHEN section. However, if meeting students outside of class every week of the term seems excessive, a teacher might consider requiring only the first two conferences to establish a rapport. After that, students are invited to come in voluntarily when they feel they need advice beyond that supplied during in-class conferences. Another option for out-of-class conferences is to meet with each student during the week that a first draft is being written. Since this could create a time problem that week, instructors might consider cancelling one class during the conference weeks. Students would then be encouraged to drop in voluntarily during non conference weeks.

In their model of the writing process, Petrosky and Brozick incorporate conferencing as an essential part of the writing process throughout the course:



A MODEL OF THE WRITING PROCESS

Concept

Example: Dreams

Can be a thought, feeling, idea, state of consciousness, value, dream, fantasy, etc.
The writers write about concepts that are close to them (in a developmental sense).
The concept can tie into a body of knowledge recently studied, experiences in the writers' lives, on-going studies, etc.

Conceptualization

Prewriting

To explore the concept and relate it to the writers' experiences.

General discussions.

Rhetorical Strategies emphasis (Focus on what the writer is going to do).

Primary Trait Type Assignments

To develop the writers' senses of audience and purpose of the assignment.

Carefully worded. Should indicate the audience and function.

Give options in writing. The options can be built around the same general concept by varying the audience and function of the task.

Example: "Imagine that you are talking to a close friend. Tell this friend about a dream so that he/she will be close to visualizing what happened to you."

Audience: close friend & teacher.
Function: Expressive/transactional—to report.

1st Writing-Reformation

Incubation-Formulation

Interaction

Talk-write.

Peer conferences.

Conferences

Rhetorical and/or Intellectual Strategies emphasis (Focus on what the writer has done and what can be done).

Students and teachers share the responsibility for focusing the conferences.

Ordinarily, a conference will last 3-5 minutes per student.

2nd Writing-Reformulation

Editing/Revising

Conferences

Intellectual Strategies and/or Syntactical Strategies emphasis (Focus on syntactic choices).

3rd Writing-Reformulation

Conferences

Assessment conferencing with each writer.

Formative and Summative assessment (Cooper and Odell, 1977).

Writing-Reformulation:

During the writing-reformulation state, when the writer actually engages in the process of putting words on paper, all the features of the writing process come to bear, and the writer must mediate among the forces that are exerted on the process and produce the final rendition of the product. In doing so, the actual transcription of the writing may alter the thought or help develop the idea further. It is to this extent that we say that the writing serves two functions: to produce a written product and to develop the writer.

Petrosky and Brozick's Model of the composing process
(English Journal, January, 1979, page 100)

Finally, suggestions are in order for incorporating conferencing within the class structure without losing either peer group editing or full class discussions. Since writing classes are usually taught in both Monday-Wednesday-Friday meetings and Tuesday-Thursday meetings, I will suggest structures for both.

If first drafts are due on Monday, students have probably just recently completed this draft so it seems the best time to share it with others and receive feedback. Previously, I've had students exchange copies and then take the papers home to read and make written comments, but I found this unsatisfactory for several reasons, not the least being that during Monday class the writers are still interested in the paper, having just written it. A delayed audience response seems to allow the writers to lose interest in their work. Another, and possibly more serious consideration, is the unfortunate tendency of readers to be distracted by inconsequential mechanical errors in the rough drafts to the point where the response is drawn entirely away from the higher to the lower priorities. Others have suggested, and I agree, that reading papers aloud in small groups of 3-4 may eliminate this distraction and keep the focus on the audience response to the purpose and content of the paper. Depending upon the length of the papers, it should be possible for a small group to read and discuss 3-4 papers, and possibly more, in which case groups could change around until end of class. As suggested in the Teacher/3 Students method of conferencing, this time would also be used by the teacher for mini-conferences within each group. Since the students are expected to respond upon first hearing the paper, it doesn't seem unrealistic for the teacher to do the same. Teachers may wish to be provided with a copy of the paper at this time in order to prepare written comments for the next series of conferencing, whether in or out of class.

Wednesday can be designated either as a class discussion/lecture day or as a peer editing day. If it is a peer editing day, I recommend forming groups of two for this task as it seems to work more effectively with two than with larger groups. If time allows, pairs can switch in mid-class thereby allowing each author to receive a second editing opinion. Again, the instructor uses this time for mini-conferencing as described in the Teacher/2 Students method. Here, the teacher can attend to those students who do not have an out-of-class conference scheduled that week if the split-class conference option is being used. If the goal is to provide personal attention to each student every week, this is one way of accomplishing it without requiring weekly out-of-class conferences for everyone. Firm believers in an incubation period for writing might prefer to use Wednesday as class discussion/lecture day and save the peer editing for Friday. Another advantage of this structure is that it gives time to make written comments, if desired. Some instructors find a full hour of class discussion/lecture too much. An alternative is to split Wednesday and Friday into half peer editing and half full-class activities.

The Tuesday-Thursday class format usually provides 80-90 minutes per class. I've found that a combination of 30 minutes of class activities with 50 minutes of small group workshop or peer editing is a good balance. The instructor's use of the mini-conference would be similar to the M-W-F format except in allowing much time for making written comments between Tuesday and Thursday. One possible solution would be to have papers due on Thursday which would give the instructor the weekend to make written comments.

Some instructors may be concerned about the allotting of so much time to small group workshops because students seem to become bored with the editing process and attention strays from the papers. This problem varies from class to class and even group to group, and it can be extremely frustrating. There are times when it seems even the most extensive preparation of students for the small group activities does not seem to carry through the term. A solution to this problem, which I discovered recently, is to provide a particular task to address along with the usual considerations. As an example, one of the tasks I assigned was revising the conclusion on the back of the paper which I collected at the end of class. This not only provides a certain sense of direction for that day's activities but also allows me to concentrate on an area I think they need to work on. With a little forethought, it is possible to vary the assignment according to individual need.

Most of us agree that we'd prefer to do more conferencing with our students because we believe the personal attention is essential to their writing growth. While we'd like to do more, we worry about the time and energy we would have to expend to double the effort we now make. Using the every-other-week conference, however, does not require the same immense effort that a once-a-term conference demands because there is time to deal with many problems over a series of meetings. In addition, the use of small group workshops and peer editing time for mini-conferences is an especially efficient use of class time. A combination of these conference methods used while students write will gradually lead to effective conferencing and, ultimately, effective writing.

Sources Cited

Carnicelli, Thomas. "The Writing Conference." *Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition*. Urbana, Ill: National Council of Teachers of English, 1980.

Duke, Charles R. "The Student-Centered Conference and the Writing Process." *English Journal*, 64 (1975).

Fisher, Lester and Murray, Donald M. "Perhaps the Professor Should Cut Class." *College English*, 35 (1973).

Jacobs, Suzanne E. and Karliner, Adela B. "Helping Writers to Think: The Effect of Speech Rate in Individual Conferences on the Quality of Thought in Student Writing." *College English*, 38 (1977).

Petrosky, Anthony R. and Brozick, James R. "A Model for Teaching Writing Based Upon Current Knowledge of the Composing Process." *English Journal*, 68 (1979).

Stalking Elephants in Academia: A Vision of Revision

Gwendolyn Ashbaugh
Michigan State University

When I hit the entry ramp onto Highway 80 north of Denver, Colorado, my truck full of clothes, books, and filing cabinets, I had no idea what awaited me as a graduate assistant in English (M.A.V., Creative Writing) at Michigan State University. I knew I was going to be teaching a composition class called English 213, and since I superstitiously believe that by methodically imagining the worst, I may somehow be spared the actual experience, visions of dread approached me like the white lines on the highway: topic sentence, rhetorical modes of discourse, Bloom taxonomies, outlines, Warriner's texts and other nameless and more terrible texts with blanks to be filled in, exercises numbered like the hills in Vietnam--would I have to teach this? When I stopped at a gas station in Kearney, Nebraska, to fill the tank and check the map, my vision blurred at the roads sprawled out before me--I mistook the towns that dotted them for words in a sentence diagrammed by a wrathful god. Traditional? Transformational? Tagmemic?

By the time I crossed the state line into Illinois, I was having serious doubts about the teaching of writing at all. It wasn't that I hadn't tried. I had spent one and a half years at a small private Catholic girls' high school in Denver, St. Mary's Academy. I taught Personal Essay, Expository Writing, and ninth grade English. Why hadn't the experience filled me with confidence and zeal? I had certainly had plenty of support and encouragement from the faculty; I enjoyed my students tremendously; I love writing--what was wrong?

As I mulled over my past experiences as a teacher and my trepidation about the future, I slowly realized the source of my anxiety: I was a Philistine! A hypocrite! Deep in my heart, I knew that what most of my St. Mary's students cared about and thought about was not what they had written about. Upon graduation, papers were abandoned; and seniors hardly clambered after the library files which had been swelling, since ninth grade, with their carefully accumulated compositions. How could I, who will never--have never--used a formal outline as the skeleton for a composition have dared to ask my students to do it? Just because it was in the curriculum? Bah!

I pulled into a rest area. I thought the truck was boiling over, but it was me--I mean I. I hoped sleep would soothe my guilty rage. But no, in my dream I was laboring over another student composition, and scrawled on a piece of white lined notebook paper was the following:

> Through the fence, between the curling flower spaces, I could see them hitting. They were coming toward where the flag was and I went along the fence. Luster was hitting in the grass by the flower tree. They took the flag out and they were hitting. Then they put the flag back and they went to the table, and he hit and the other hit. Then they went on, and I went along the fence. Luster came away from the flower tree and we went along the fence and they stopped and we stopped and I looked through the fence while Luster was hunting in the grass.

With my red pen, I was circling words, drawing arrows, writing AWKWARD, VAGUE, PRONOUN REFERENCE, REDUNDANT, CLUMSY, SENTENCE STRUCTURE in the margins. At the bottom of the page I put a big red "F." I handed the paper to a poker-faced, surly-looking fellow who studied it for a moment, scrawled something, and then tossed it back at me and sauntered out. After the "F," he had written "aulkner." It was the first paragraph of The Sound and the Fury. Verbatim.

By the end of my first term, I had accomplished quite a bit. (In one of my favorite essays, "The Art of Literature and Commonsense," Vladimir Nabokov recommends the "much abused ivory tower" with the following admonition: "Before building oneself an ivory tower," he says, "one must take the unavoidable trouble of killing quite a few elephants." By my syllabus alone--and this was borne out by the relative success of my first term--I felt that I had already slain several sizeable beasts:

1. THE GRADE MONGREL. Relieved to receive extensive written and verbal comments from me and from their peers, my students were spared the humiliation of having to whine and grovel for grades which, in any case, could never have been accurately assigned to their individual writings.

2. THE AUTOHIPPOCRITE. This animal is, of course, the teacher in his or her most despotic guise: A cross

between an autocrat and a hypocrite, with the tough-skinned, pig-headed acumen of a hippopotamus. In the workshop, where my suggestions and opinions were tempered by suggestions and opinions of others, this monster became extinct.

3. THE "ENGFISH." This omnivorous creature was first spotted by a student of Ken Macrorie. In response to one of her autohippocrites, she wrote, "Day each that we tumble into the glass he sez to mee, 'Eets too badly that you someday fright preach Engfish'" (1976). The stale, phony, pseudo--prosaic Engfish is hard to kill, since it is the cliche-ridden, jargon-ridden writing that all of us fall prey to. Nevertheless, in a class without grades, without pretense, where all hearts and pencils are sharpened against it, the Engfish grows anemic and seeks happier hunting grounds.

By my second term at Michigan State University, I decided that demanding specific assignments--no matter how open-ended they were--was not useful to my students. I wanted to emphasize writing, not the out-guessing game of requirements; I wanted creation, not fill-in-the-dots. My high school experience had already taught me a terrible truth: students resist freedom; they like to be told what to write, how many words to use, etc. etc. because they can then disown the form and content of their compositions, leaving the teacher with a fat Engfish to fry.

All in all, I was pleased with the beasts I was able to bag and stuff in my composition class. Not that I always came away with a trophy--far from it. But I did feel that I was being allowed to create a climate in my classroom that encouraged experimentation. My students got so that they weren't afraid to use dialogue, for example, simply because they felt unsure as to how to punctuate it. I tried to teach them that matters of mechanics and style were meant to serve them--not the other way about. Still, it seemed that just as my students were beginning to trust me; just as we had prodded the Engfish into the darker corner of the classroom, the term would be over and a whole new batch of style-shocked, grammar-shy, five-paragraph veterans would fill the empty seats.

When writing is taught as a process and not as a product, a marvelous possibility emerges: the possibility of revision. But after my second term at M.S.U., I decided to expunge the term from the syllabus: too many papers came back re-typed, re-spelled, re-phrased, or re-organized. The mere idea of revision seemed to put a freeze on the spirit of experimentation I tried to foster in the class. Why, I wondered, if the first draft had not been graded, did my students merely correct the mechanics, without making any attempt to consider the intention, audience, and so-called voice of their papers? I still have no names for the stages of the writing process but that is because I fear that there really are no stages. The process of writing is not accurately described by the terms "prewriting," "writing," and "rewriting." Not much more accurate are the terms Donald M. Murray proposes: "prevision," "vision," and "revision" (1975). The sad truth of the matter is that no matter how many drafts have been written, the process remains the same: writing, writing, and writing. What does change, draft by draft, is the writer's understanding of how the idea or intention of the paper can be embodied and communicated to an audience.

This idea, this passion, or germ of perception is the biggest, whitest elephant of all. This is the immortal, unkillable elephant before whom we are all blind; and no matter how relentlessly we map out its contours on our lined notebook paper or erasable bond, it remains illusive and stubbornly inigmatic. This is the Elephant of Invention. How to stalk it?

The way I have chosen to stalk it--at least in these pages--is to examine a "vision" and "revision" of one of my students, Tobi Hitow. I consider her revision to be a particularly successful one, and my hope is that by examining the process by which she was able to arrive at her revision, I may be able to facilitate the duplication of that process for other, less fortunate students.

Here, then, is her first draft in its entirety:

DOWN BY THE RIVER

Tobi Hitow

The river water glistened in the warm sunshine, reflecting blue, green and yellow hues. Trees fringed the embankment, green, lush and strong. They swayed to the breeze. Wild-flowers dotted the grass, surviving in spite of their invasion of more tame plants. Ducks, with their babies, glided on the water. "Quack". The sound meshed together with nature's music. The sun melted away my troubles and the calm river soothed my nerves, delivering me to a place that only I could inhabit.

I had yearned, all day, to escape to my place. Finally I was alone; removed from demanding people and the pressures of society. The river had a special meaning for me. It encompassed my thoughts and flowed with them, rythemically. It knew of the pains and of the triumphs in my life.

I discovered the river years ago. I needed a place to be alone and to examine my life. I needed to cry and to laugh without inhibition. I needed to write a poem without somebody looking over my shoulder or to think aloud without an answer. The river was my answer.

The river helped me solve problems and had been witness to my deep emotions. From the time that I lost my first Teddy Bear, to the time that I lost my first love, it was the only thing that I could count on. I would sit on the embankment, pouring out my hearts secrets. I explained my inner motives and cried out my agonizing pains. It never answered, but it helped as it flowed continously; soothing and reassuring.

I remember the time that I thought that I would die. My heart had been taken and crushed in the name of love. I thought it would never beat again. A terrible weapon had cut into me, causing searing pain and endless tears. I had lost my boyfriend and wanted to lose myself too. I was swallowed up in agonizing emotion and was enable to resurface. Nothing would ever be the same. I felt alone. Justice did not exist. The world was not fair. Love was not forever.

I avoided the river. I was overwhelmed and was afraid I could not handle a confrontation with myself. I did not want my questions answered yet. I did not want to feel the total lonliness. I wallowed in the hurt, while every emotion pierced my heart, slicing it again and again. I stayed away from the one thing I knew would understand. But I was not ready to be understood yet. To be understood would force me to accept and go on.

Slowly, time ticked by and the constant sharp pain faded to an occassional dull throb. The world was fair because everyone was allowed happiness and sadness. Love was forever because its memory lingered in the heart. Things were not the same, yet I felt older and stronger. I was more capable. I was ready to go back.

The river was the same as it was when I left it. The trees were still tall, yet they were stronger. The birds still sang their melody unaware of my return. The grass grew in spite of my absense. Though many storms had come, forcing them to weather them, they looked more beautiful. The river still flowed, relaxing me, pulling me into its pattern. I, like the river, had survived the storm and became stronger with time.

Previous to her writing of this paper, I had been lecturing my class about detail. "Don't just tell a story," I said, "show it." Here, in her paper, were plenty of details, trees, flowers, ducks, etc., but the longest tail of all was still that of the Engfish, weaving menacingly between the lines. In fact, when Tobi came up after class to ask me what I thought of her paper, I was afraid to tell her. How could I tell her that I thought her paper was a sentimental cliche, sprinkled with mixed, trite metaphors? Rather than confess my feelings, I began going over some of the mechanical errors of her paper with her. "Quack!" said her duck of the first paragraph. "You quack teacher you!" I stopped: mechanics was not the way to good writing. The duck was right.

Instead, I summoned my courage and told her what I thought of her paper. And I told her why. I told her that although there were lots of details in the paper, it was still a "telling" paper and not a "showing" one. I told her that by simply telling about a "searing pain" she was not showing it. I told her that I could not appreciate the "I" of her story because I could not find one thing about the "I" that was memorable, unique, or different from any other "I" that ever cried on a river bank.

We talked about the intention of her paper for about an hour. Although her story was "true," she said that what she had really wanted to communicate was the feeling of loss and the seeking of solace from the river. By concentrating on that feeling, and that action, I was able to offer the following suggestions for a revision:

1. Would it help to change the person of the paper; that is, instead of I, Tobi, could the story be told with more success with Tobi as an omniscient narrator?

2. Would it help to have dialogue? Could the girl of the story have a conversation with someone, or remember a conversation that she had with someone?

3. Who was the boyfriend? Was there any specific reason for the girl's loss? Was she betrayed? Did he die by accident? Was he an indifferent goon? What happened?

4. Was there any way to show what the river meant to her? How could the reader know that the river was her river, her special refuge?

5. Was there a symbol or object that could embody the girl's feelings about the boyfriend? Could Tobi make use of a device such as a letter, a ring, a heart and initials carved on the tree?

Tobi asked me if her next version had to be autobiographical. I said, no, it certainly didn't. We talked about nonfiction, about how, no matter how faithful to facts, a piece of writing was doomed to be at least partly artifice. Why not lie, if by lying, the truth is made more accessible to the reader? We talked until I began to see a glimmer of hope in her eye for a more successful revision.

The next week, when Tobi read her revision to the class, I could not believe what I was hearing. The class was silent when she finished. We were moved and impressed:

THE RIVER

The girl raced down the old, beaten path, searching. "Damn. How could he do this to me? How?" Her violet eyes glaring, her fists clenched, she slowed down and surveyed her territory, her secret place. At least here, no humans could bother her, and play with her mind and emotions. This place was hers. Screw people! Who needed them, anyways? To think that she had allowed herself to fall. Who needed Love, anyways? Not her. She had done without him for so long, she could do without him now. "The bastard." Her mouth tightened.

She came to her Weeping Willow Tree whose branches fringed the rivers embankment. She sat underneath it, crosslegged and dug up black, moist soil with her fingers. She lifted a rusting metal tool box out of the freshly made hole and placed it on the ground.

She did not open the box at first. She only sat with her arms folded tightly and her eyebrows knitted together, and shuddered. She raised her arms straight above her head and slammed her closed fists on the ground. Arms and fists flew up and down, banging the ground again and again.

She hated him for doing this to her. Let him rot in Hell for all she cared. Life would go on, probably. She pushed out of her mind the visions of a sickly, frail man, smiling. She wanted to remember him the other way, the way that she was most used to; a man lying on the couch, not remembering who his daughter was and saying hurtful, mean things. "The bastard" Up down, up down, her fists slammed the ground again and again.

****

When she was young, Leegh took her teddy bear to the secret river and played "House" with him. She entertained herself, this way, for hours. Sometimes, Teddy would be her brother and they told each other secrets and laughed. Sometimes, they would be husband and wife:

"Oh darling, you're home" Leegh smiled at the brown one-eyed bear. "Dinner's ready."

"I need a Scotch," Leegh make the bear-husband answer back.

"But darling..." Leegh frowned.

"I need a drink. It's been a hard day, damnit. You just don't understand. You never do. You don't have the pressures that I have. You don't even know what stress is. You must sit home with Leegh all day--how hard can that be?"

Leegh would pretend that the bear could drink out of the small shot glass she had stolen from her father's liquor cabinet. After the bear drank, she made the bear lay down. He would stare at the sky with his one eye. "I hate you!" Leegh glared back.

Leegh would go to her secret place and write in a bound notebook. She scribbled feelings that she could not share with anybody else. She hid the pages in a big, old toolbox that had once been her fathers. Now, she kept it buried in the soil so that nobody could see the things that she wrote about. She created characters on paper and dictated the rules that they lived by:

> "The man had not seen his father for years, yet he still could not forget all that the old man had done to him. He felt for the gun in his pocket, as he walked up the steps. He was prepared for the reunion."

Thank God that nobody saw the things that she wrote about. But nobody ever would. The river was her private world and no tresspassers were allowed into it. There, she was safe. No judgement. No harsh words.

Often, Leegh's friends would try to pressure her and get her to do the one thing that she was afraid to do:

"C'mon Leegh, just one drink. It'll feel good. Make you relax." They pushed beer into her hands.

"No. I just don't want to. Leave me alone, Damnit!" Later when she was alone by the river, she imagined herself out of control and saying mean, hurting things. "I'm never going to be like that. Disgusting". She took the metal box out of the ground and punched her old one eyed bear. "I hate you!"

One day, Leegh sat by the river writing about the night before. The night that everything changed. Her mother had even smiled this morning and kissed her good-bye before she went to the hospital again. Leegh was glad that Mom went to visit her father the night before. She was glad that her mother had finally convinced her to go too.

"He's so changed, darling. He really is. And he wants to see you. Make up for the lost time."

Leegh was reluctant, but decided to go. Nothing could be worse and maybe it could be better. Her father was different away from life's pressures, away from his bottles of scotch. And they talked. They really talked. And he really listened. He seemed so frail, grayed, propped up against the white pillows. He told her how he realized that he was an awful father. But after he was out, after he received the help he needed, he would make it up to her. He even smiled at her, an action that he had rarely done for her.

"I love you, Leegh. Please forgive me."

Her heart skipped a beat, her stomache fluttered. Could love exist?

"I---loveyoutoo." The words slipped out as she closed the hospital door behind her. Her violet eyes shone. Perhaps life was fair after all.

****

But life wasn't fair, Damnit! It wasn't fair at all. Up, down, up down, her fists banged the ground again and again. Who needed love anyways? How could he leave her...how could he? "What a jerk!" She ripped open the metal box that she had dug up and grabbed out the old shot glass that she still kept. She smashed it against the Willow Tree. "I hate you!" She snatched the bear and ripped off his worn head. "I hate you!" Her vicious eyes shone. She took the bound notebook in her hands and ripped out all of its pages. "I hate you, hate you, HATE YOU!" She threw the bear into the river and watched as the current took it away. "You bastard. Couldn't you just let it be? I got along just fine when you were a stinking drunk. Why did you have to die right when...Why?"

The river's water glistened in the warm sunshine as it carried away the bear, indifferently.

I was surprised to learn, much later, that the story was not true; it seemed so much closer to a real experience than had the original version. What had made Tobi's revision succeed? I asked her to write down her version of the process by which the revision had come into being:

> That night I went home and began to write. I decided to use third person instead of first person so that the paper would not be so risky. I wasn't quite ready to expose all of my feelings to a class that I barely knew. In my revision, I wanted to show why loss was so difficult for my character to bear. I wanted to show a childhood that was tough and painful. As I began to write, a strange thing began to happen. My mind kept racing with thoughts. I soon had an entire story and I had forgotten all about the boyfriend. I decided to forget about the boyfriend; the father worked much better. The story was not true, but the feelings of loss was and it was conveyed better through my new story. I remembered what Gwen had told me before I left that afternoon: I might start writing something different from what I had intended. Go with my thoughts: "All roads lead to Rome" she told me, and it had happened.

I am now nearing the end of my third term at M.S.U., and of the ninety or so revisions I have persued since then, very few of them have been as dramatic or remarkable as Tobi's. Reviewing her second draft, there are three aspects which are particularly striking to me:

1. Tobi took a risk. She was not afraid to abandon the text of her original draft. She kept the latent content of the original intact (although she explored the emotion: loss=anger=abandonment), but altered the manifest content, thus revealing the intention of her story more fully--or, as she says, inventing a new intention.

2. Tobi found a way to embody the emotions of her first draft. She discovered what T. S. Elliot has called an "objective correlative" for the feelings of loss which were barely communicated by her first version.

3. Tobi took advantage of various techniques that made the subject more accessible and interesting to the reader:
    - -flashback: to childhood, hospital, home
    - -dialogue, monologue: Leegh & Bear, Leegh & father etc.
    - -symbolism: the bear, shotglass, toolbox, notebook

Without a sensitive awareness of audience, and a willingness to take a risk, it is doubtful that Tobi could have written her paper.

What Tobi accomplished is what Donald Murray calls an "internal revision." The correcting of mechanical errors and the polishing up of the second draft would amount to what Murray calls "external revision." Tobi's paper taught me a lesson: I would never, I prayed, hide behind picky "external" editing comments; I would never nibble at the margins of a composition without first communicating my emotional and intellectual responses to the content--the hidden or internal intention--of a student's paper. I shudder to think what might have happened if I had merely corrected the text of her first draft, and even worse, if I had assigned a grade to it. I vowed I would never try to pass myself off to my students as the type of English teacher who thinks she is the only blind person who can see the elephant. Now, whenever I am tempted to seek refuge in the pettyfoggery of mechanics, I hear Tobi's duck shouting, "Quack! Quack!" and I retreat with my bloodied pen until the internal issues of the paper have been discussed.

This experience, and others like it, have caused me to wonder about the role of the writing teacher in the classroom. Are we therapists in literary drag? If the intention or content of a paper is the only thing that counts, then why not psychoanalyze the student until the "real stuff" emerges and then tell the student to go write about it? Why not turn the class into a group therapy session?

My response exactly matches the dying words of a notorious--if fictional--elephant killer: "The Horror! The Horror!" Yes, we are therapists, but we are therapists of the writing process--not the writer. It is true that at times, in conferences or in class, I have remarked the similarities between the therapist and the writing teacher: both engage their patients or students in a kind of transference and countertransference relationship; both act as catalysts, the cracked mirror in which the patients or students may see their own perceptions reflected. The purpose, however, is very different. The analyst is trained to be concerned with the patient's personality and behavior; the writing teacher--usually not trained--must learn to be concerned with the student's writing process. The best training for the writing teacher is writing--the act of writing. Armed--or better say disarmed--with an active understanding of what it's like to write, the writing teacher may then venture into the classroom. But without any understanding of the writing process, the writing teacher is liable to end up like Kurtz--doing savage, unspeakable things in the heart of darkness.

What follows, then is a humble arsenal for revision, by a first-year veteran teacher of sophomore composition:

FOR THE TEACHER

1. Write, and remember the "Golden Rule."

2. Keep the writing process in mind. There are no neat, tidy stages in writing and revising, since writing happens in fits and starts. Call it whatever you want, but look for this:
    Chomsky: the "deep structure"
    Freud: the "latent" or subconscious content
    Eliot: the emotion to which the "objective correlative" is attached
    I. A. Richards: the "tenor"

   Then see if there is any way you can help the student improve this:
    Chomsky: the "surface structure"
    Frued: the "manifest" content
    Eliot: the "objective correlative" for the emotion
    I. A. Richards: the "vehicle"

3. Do not fall prey to what W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley call the "intentional fallacy." Be aware of the fact that often, the manifest content of a piece of writing may reveal a latent content that was not intended by the student. (In Tobi's revision, for example, the boyfriend was metamorphosed into a father.) The success of a composition, in other words, may not always be judged by the author's expressed intention in producing it. Often, the writing/therapist must work backwards--from manifest content to latent content, as well as the other way around.

4. Make sure to address issues of internal revision _first_. If you go wild with the red pen on issues of external revision on a first draft, you will never get a good revision, but rather a correction.

5. Put yourself in the student's place. Then, try to think of all the possible ways the paper could be improved:
    a. TONE: Can you bag an Engfish? Does the tone enhance the content?
    b. FORM or STRUCTURE: Does the organization of the paper reveal the content? Would the paper benefit from a switch to dialogue instead of straight narrative?
    c. VOICE: Should the author change the paper from the third person to the first person? From the first to the third? Does the narrator of the story or essay need to have more personality or style?

    d. LANGUAGE: Should the student go to a thesaurus for alternate word choices? Should the student research the subject enough to mine a lexicon appropriate for it? Is the paper full of weak being verbs (what I call V.D.: verb disease)?

6. Give the paper the "So what?" test. Do not be afraid to respond honestly to the content of the paper. If you think the student's paper is dull, cliche, crude, trivial, or even completely unsalvageable, it is important to tell the student so. First ask yourself, "Could this matter?" "Could I care about this? How?" If you can encourage the student to explore the infinite possible ways to embody ideas, you will have more success than if you pick at the wilted, lifeless verbiage of a poor first draft.

7. It is impossible to avoid being prescriptive (are not all teachers the prescribed antidotes for ignorance and lack of skill?) But it is all too easy for brainstorming to degenerate into brainwashing. Don't revise student's papers for them, and don't judge a revision by how well students have carried out _your_ intention for their papers. Because of the student's natural desire to please and excel, he or she will always be quick to notice the bias of the teacher. If the teacher likes neat typing more than good writing, that's what the teacher will get. Many revisions that I have read have been contaminated with what usually amounts to a parody of my suggestions; it is difficult to convince the student to weigh suggestions without mistaking them for commands.

8. Let your passion for writing, and your compassion for those individuals involved in the writing process show. Try not to be the only critic of a student's composition. Always allow your feedback to be humbled and informed by the feedback of others in the class.

FOR THE STUDENT:

1. If you care about your ideas, your emotions, and your experiences, you will find a way to care about what you write. Write something you'd like to stick on the refrigerator or send to Farrar Straus & Giorux. Writing is a contact sport. When you care about what you write, it's like playing tennis with someone who is better than you: your writing will come up to the standard of your opponent.

2. Remember that nobody--not even your English teacher--knows exactly what's going to happen when he or she

sits down to write. Writing happens, as an M.S.U. professor said, "by the seat of your chair and the seat of your pants." Slowly, as another professor said, "the conscious mind sends down tap roots to the unconscious." Don't be afraid to let that process take place, and never be ashamed of it. (see sources at end for names of professors at this symposium.)

3. Remember that a revision should never be a correction. Rather, it is a re-"vision." Remember that there are lots of ways to stalk an elephant, your first draft is only one. Ask yourself the same questions the teacher asks above.

4. Writing is not just auto-theraputic. There is an audience besides yourself who must be taken into consideration. Remember that the audience is your audience, and not the prudish, nitpicking autohippocrite of your high school nightmares.

5. Write first; punctuate later. Write first; proof later. If you find yourself in a situation where you are being punished for these priorities, try, by all means, to humanize your aggressor. If that fails, either drop the course, or take the pride of the apostate in your red "F."

FOR THE ACADEMY:

1. Hire writing teachers who write.
2. Create an atmosphere for your writing teachers where the following can take place:
    a. conferencing: The writing teacher needs to have the chance to talk at length with each student individually. In a high school, where the teacher is scheduled for every hour of the day, this essential conferencing is just as important, but more difficult to arrange. Help the writing teacher arrange it.
    b. freedom from prescribed materials: The best materials are the students' writings. Any other materials should be chosen, according to preference, by the writing teacher who writes.
    c. freedom from prescribed accountability: The teacher should not be judged according to how many exercises his or her students complete, or how far the teacher got in the prescribed textbook that should--in any case--have been abolished. A process cannot be packaged, branded, or mass produced--otherwise it will become a product. The teacher should be allowed to replicate, in his or her classroom, a situation that encourages the writing process to

> take place. That situation, and that teacher, should be evaluated by students and evaluators who write.

It seems to me that the number one fear in writing is the fear of the unknown. If Freud was right--that every fear contains a wish--then the wish that lurks behind the fear of writing is the wish for the unknown. Writing is one process by which the unknown may be explored. From draft to draft, revision after revision, the process does not change; the fear and the wish are locked together. As teachers, we must try to encourage our students to keep at least one hand groping the contours of the unknown, since we are all merely the blind cartographers of that most inscrutable beast: the Elephant of Invention.

Sources Cited

Macrorie, Ken. *Telling Writing*. New Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Heyden, 1976.

Murray, Donald H. "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery," Paper for the Buffalo Conference on Research in Composing, State University of New York at Buffalo, November 8, 1975.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lectures on Literature*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980.

Conference at Michigan State University: an informal discussion of the writing process by six professors: Dr. Bernard Engel, Dr. David Anderson, Dr. Linda Wagner, Dr. Robert Uphaus, Dr. Russell Nye, Dr. Richard Lebeaux and Dr. Douglas Peterson.

Focus on Feedback

Mary McInnis Roessler
Lake Odessa Schools

Ever since English as a subject was born in this country some one hundred years ago, English teachers have struggled with the task of responding to students' written work. Over the years the content and style of our responses have changed as we have figured out more about both the learning and the writing processes and about how best to facilitate them. During the late nineteenth century, evaluation was largely negative and mechanics-oriented, emphasizing errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and diction. Beginning in our century there has been a gradual shift in perspective. As early as 1912, Alfred M. Hitchcock, a highly respected composition textbook author and teacher, admonished the readers of one of the first English Journals:

> "Don't be a ferret. Overlook many errors. Take it for granted that some blunders are but marks of youthfulness. And don't try to make a purse out of a whistle. Some young people haven't much to say and never will have...In the teaching of composition...the instructor's sole duty is to train the pupil that he will be able to express himself, regardless of whether that self be a Milton or a Mollusk."

The early years of the twentieth century brought encouragement of a more positive stance toward student writing from other sources as well. Lois Rosen points out that Carpenter, Baker, and Scott's, The Teaching of English in the Elementary and the Secondary School (1913), advocated a method of essay correction that aimed at building up the students' self-confidence by taking into consideration their developmental stage and ability. The authors also proposed the double grade, one for mechanics and one for content, insisting that: "Good thinking expressed in incorrect language must not be tolerated, but neither must correct language without good thinking."

Sixty years later methods of evaluation and feedback continue to be in a state of flux. Researchers agree that there has been no study which points conclusively to a single "best technique" for administering them. Many advise that the most successful approach is likely to be eclectic: one that includes responses which are both oral and written, positive and corrective; comments from both teachers and peers which deal with ideas as well as mechanics and which take into consideration the writer and the writing process as much as the written product.

We have learned that the most efficacious way to address the above concerns is through formative evaluation, i.e. feedback responses given to students as they are in the process of creating as opposed to comments on the finished product. Formative evaluation, when carried on regularly and continuously, is more than the traditional written and often cursory comments and/or corrections of the teacher on the student's rough draft. It can, in fact, many argue, be handled most effectively without any teacher intervention at all through the technique of peer evaluation, which I will discuss in detail later in the chapter.

Mary H. Beaven points out the assumptions which underlie formative evaluation. They include the following:

a. Growth in writing occurs slowly and is a highly individualistic process.
b. Through their evaluatory comments and symbols teachers help to create an environment for writing.
c. Risk-taking, trying new behaviors as one writes, and stretching one's use of language and toying with it are important for growth in writing.
d. Writing improvement does not occur in isolation. (1977)

Formative evaluation is feedback at its best because it becomes, as Toby Fulwiler suggests, "a component of the whole process of learning, not merely an appendage" (1981). In a survey I completed recently of one hundred high school composition students, over three times as many of them preferred "in-process" feedback to comments on their final drafts. In fact almost one quarter of those surveyed felt that, comparatively speaking, summative evaluation was of very little help to them as writers.

The most popular purveyor of feedback, be it during or after the writing process, is still the teacher. The attitudes of the students I surveyed are probably typical: on a scale of one (not helpful) to five (very helpful), eighty-five percent of them ranked feedback from their instructor either a four or a five. The popularity of teacher feedback may well derive from the fact that, over the years, the teacher has been the most common, often, indeed, the sole source of feedback of any kind. We have set ourselves up as the authorities and now, in a sense, we must "pay the piper." And although Carpenter, et. al., in their 1913 text suggested somewhat euphorically that "essay correcting...may in a true sense become a joy forever," even the most enthusiastic and dedicated among us would probably not choose that particular euphemism to describe the task.

That is one of the reasons, albeit one of the less pedogogically significant ones, to cultivate peer evaluation. There are others. James Moffet explains that peer evaluation provides student writers with a larger audience, one which responds and comments to them more in their own terms. He insists that it is "much easier for peers than for a teacher to give an authentic response" and that the teacher is "likely to focus too soon on technique. By habitually responding and coaching, students get insights about their own writing. They become much more involved in writing and in reading what others have written" (1968). In addition peer evaluation gives students the opportunity to strengthen their interpersonal skills. Mary Beaven mentions several research studies which indicate that improvement in writing ability through peer evaluation may equal or even exceed that which occurs with teacher evaluation.

Some conscientious teachers familiar with peer evaluation find it attractive in theory but somewhat unsatisfactory in practice. It can present difficulties: parents may complain that teachers aren't doing their job; some students may be intimidated, others may enjoy ego-tripping, still others may feel it is simply "the blind leading the blind." Nevertheless, its adherents maintain that peer evaluation, when handled properly, can provide students with valuable feedback during the writing process and can lead them to become better readers and editors as well as better writers. The crucial task is, of course, to handle it properly.

All agree that it is a procedure which requires *repeated practice* in order to develop competence and that a series of *preliminary steps* is necessary before actual evaluation can begin. One such series is suggested by Scott McNabb in *Evaluating a Theme*. He proposes the following steps:

1. Establish a comfortable atmosphere. Talk about the purposes of peer evaluation with the class.
2. Form groups of four or five and assign an introductory, "getting-acquainted" project for each to perform (interviews, communicative games or puzzles, communal writings).
3. Provide each student with a list of possible responses to another's writing. (See Peter Elbow's book, *Writing Without Teachers*.)

4. Regroup the class and, stating that the class will act as a model of the small group, evaluate a few papers...
5. In small groups, evaluate another paper from a different class. The teacher circulates from group to group participating briefly in discussions and answering questions.
6. Regroup as a class again and evaluate a rough draft of the teacher's. (These first six steps take approximately four class sessions.)
7. Begin small group evaluation...

When students are new to the process of peer evaluation, it is important to give the small group specific tasks and guidelines which will help them to complete these tasks. For example, you may want to begin with something as simple as asking each student to point out one thing he or she likes about a particular piece of writing. Later, as students become more comfortable and more proficient at giving feedback, you can provide them with a guide for more detailed editing.

Peter Elbow, in *Writing Without Teachers*, recommends the "center of gravity" response which includes:

1. *Pointing* to words and phrases which successfully penetrated your skull.
2. *Telling* the writer everything that happened to you as you tried to read his words carefully.
3. *Summarizing* the writing:
    a. First tell what you found to be the main points, main feelings, or centers of gravity.
    b. Then summarize it into a single sentence.
    c. Then choose *one word* from the writing which best summarizes it.
    d. Then choose a word that isn't in the writing to summarize it. This insures that the writer is getting your response filtered through your perception and experiences--not just parroted. (1973)

Elbow emphasizes repeatedly the importance of responding *personally* rather than theoretically to others' writing. Students should be encouraged to express what they understand from a given piece of writing and how it strikes them rather than immediately trying to point out "errors."

As peer groups become more self-sufficient, there is a growing sense of independence and competence in the classroom. The teacher is freed up to become a guide and a helper as well as a fellow writer. Donald Murray, an eloquent advocate of peer teaching, summarizes the results of such a situation: "When the teacher can stop teaching, can stand back and see his students teaching themselves, then he has succeeded. His ambition should be to teach as little as possible, and eventually not at all. He is most successful when the students have become their own teachers" (1968).

The more conservative among us will probably not be ready to relinquish our role in the classroom so completely. And, because different students function best in different kinds of learning environments, it is probably wise to retain peer evaluation as only one of several components in our feedback system. This would seem to be supported by the results of my survey. Seventy-five percent of the students ranked feedback from their teacher as more helpful to them than feedback from their peers. That low ranking for peer evaluation, however, may well stem from not having had much opportunity to practice it. Be that as it may, for those of us who are seeking a real audience for our students' writing, and a way for them to develop, as Beaven puts it, "a sense of group inclusion, acceptance, support, trust, reality-testing and collaboration," peer evaluation may well be a boon of unexpected proportions.

A second technique for carrying out formative evaluation, one which escapes some of the criticisms of peer evaluation and gives the teacher the opportunity to respond more fully and more personally to student writing, is conferencing. The conference is of particular value because it provides a more effective communication situation than written feedback. Teachers become not simply editors or evaluators but also, if we take full advantage of the opportunity, listeners who encourage students to talk about their work and to ask questions of real concern to themselves.

Joyce Armstrong Carroll, in her article, "Talking Through the Writing Process," insists that there is a strong need for oral rather than written communication at all four stages of the composing process: prewriting, writing, rewriting, and postwriting. She sees the student-teacher conference as most benefical at stage three, rewriting. She believes that the value of conferencing is enhanced by keeping it voluntary and adds, "The psychological beauty of the in-class conference is that even the reluctant or recalcitrant see cordiality and sense the positive, constructive nature of talk" (1981). Donald Stewart, another advocate of the conferencing method, reminds us that conferences humanize the writing process because, "They convey that authenticity is respected and content is valuable--valuable enough to discuss, share, and polish" (1980).

Students, too, see conferencing as a desirable way to receive feedback. In the survey I conducted, one of them observed, "When written comments are made and not discussed, they may not be understood or they may even be taken the wrong way."

In all classes surveyed, a majority of students preferred oral feedback, or some combination of oral and written feedback, to written feedback alone.

Although conferencing has many advantages, it also has a couple of disadvantages: it can consume a great deal of class-time and it provides no written record of what has been discussed for the student to consult later. These, however, are not insurmountable difficulties if we are flexible and well-organized and have conditioned our students to work independently or in small groups. In an English Journal article, Michael O'Brien offers the following suggestions for eliminating or at least minimizing these problems:

> 1. Assign papers of about four hundred words for you can get through six or seven of them in a fifty-minute class period.
> 2. While you work individually with students, have the others work on other writing assignments or on worksheets.
> 3. Have the students bring their journals to record your comments, favorable and critical. This helps identify chronic problems and areas for improvement. (It also provides them with a "memory tickler" to consult when they begin revising.) (1982)

In order to have successful conferences, we must, of course, be effective communicators. John Hagaman, in a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication in March of 1980, suggested five important principles of conferencing:

We should:

1. convey positive regard for the other person.
2. show empathetic understanding for the feelings and ideas of others.
3. acknowledge openly our own ideas and feelings.
4. actively involve the other person in the communication act.
5. strive for positive rather than negative feedback.

Finally, then, the teacher's role in conferencing is multi-faceted. We do not sit simply as judges, but, as Marylyn E. Calabrese would have it, "as partners, encouraging coaches, adult readers, helpers, critics, and diagnosticians" (1982). As such, the writing conference requires a great deal of time and energy, but it is quality time in class with the students devoted to productive two-way communication, a system which students, almost without exception, respond to enthusiastically, particularly if the conference is voluntary. Conferencing is a highly effective method of individualizing education and establishing better interpersonal relationships with our students while, at the same time, reducing to some extent our out-of-class written work, a combination of advantages which makes it an appealing and fruitful technique.

Formative evaluation, carried out through peer groups and conferencing, along with the more traditional written comments if the teacher desires, is a critical component of the writing process, indeed of the whole learning process. It is when we discuss our ideas that we explore them most fully; it is when we are permitted, without penalty, to not "have it right" the first time, to rethink, modify, expand--to discover--what we want to say, aided whenever possible by others, that we grow. Formative evaluation allows us to do all these things, and therefore it is the most important kind of evaluation we receive--or give. And, since each student is different, we are most effective when we are able to vary our methodology, thus responding to students as individuals. Certainly no single approach can accomplish everything. Our best advice, again, is to be eclectic, limited only by our teaching style, our sense of language, our time constraints, and the amount of energy we are able to bring to the task. If we have learned anything about the fine art of evaluating writing in this century, I hope it is this.

Sources Cited

Beaven, Mary H. "Individualized Goal Setting, Self-evaluation, and Peer Evaluation," in Charles R. Cooper & Lee Odell, Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, and Judging, Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1977, pgs. 135-156.

Calabrese, Marylyn E. "I Don't Grade Papers Anymore," English Journal, Vol. 71, No. 1, January 1982, pgs. 28-31.

Carroll, Joyce Armstrong. "Talking Through the Writing Process," English Journal, Vol. 70, No. 7, November 1981, pgs. 100-102.

Cooper, Charles R. & Lee Odell, eds. Evaluating Writing: Describing, Measuring, Judging, Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1977.

Donovan Timothy R. & Ben W. McClelland, eds. Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition, NCTE, 1980.

Elbow, Peter. Writing Without Teachers, Oxford University Press, London, 1973.

Hagaman, John. "Toward More Effective Teacher Response to Student Writing," a paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, March 13-15, 1980.

Hitchcock, Alfred M. English Journal, 1912, quoted in Richard Cordin, The Teaching of Writing in Our Schools, The MacMillan Co., New York: NCTE, 1966.

Maxwell, Rhoda J. & Stephen Judy, Evaluating a Theme, MCTE, 1981.

--------------------------, Eds. Composing, MCTE, 1979.

McNabb, Scott E. "Evaluating Toward Revision: The Beginning, Not the End, of Composing," in Maxwell & Judy, eds, Evaluating a Theme, MCTE, 1981, pgs. 31-56.

Moffett, James. Teaching the Universe of Discourse, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1968.

Murray, Donald M. "Internal Revision," in Charles R. Cooper & Lee Odell, eds., Research on Composing: Points of Departure, Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1978.

----------. A Writer Teaches Writing: A practical Method of Composition, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1968.

O'Brien, Michael. "Oral Evaluation: An Effective Vehicle," English Journal, Vol. 71, No. 1, January 1982, pgs. 43-44.

Parker, Willam Riley. "Where Do English Departments Come From?" in Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett, eds., The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook, Oxford University Press, New York, 1981, pgs. 3-19.

Rosen, Lois Matz. "Responding to Student Writing: Historical Perspectives," in Maxwell & Judy, eds., Evaluating a Theme, MCTE, 1981, pgs. 9-20.

----------. "Responding to Student Writing: Steps Toward Self-assessment," in Maxwell & Judy, eds., Composing, MCTE, 1979, pgs. 55-66.

Samuelson, Janet. "Responding and Evaluating: The Search for Alternatives," in Maxwell & Judy, eds., Evaluating a Theme, MCTE, 1981, pgs. 27-30.

Stewart, Donald, in the staff interchange of College Composition and Communication, October, 1980, quoted in Carroll. (See previous page)

Tate, Gary & Edward P. J. Corbett, eds., The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook, Oxford University Press, New York, 1981.

Collected
Writing Assignments
(That Work)

The Authors

For a man to write well, there are three required necessities--to read the best authors, observe the best speakers, and much exercise of his own style.

--Ben Jonson, 1640

Are Jonson's "three required necessities" sufficient to produce a great writer or necessary but not sufficient?

What is your idea of a perfect vacation?

Show and Tell

a. Ask students to bring to the class one thing which means a lot to them. It could be an old watch or an old picture, or anything.
b. Divide the students into groups and share with each other the things brought.
c. Ask the students to write down the stories on the things brought. Classmates comments are encouraged to be included. The writing could be in poems or any other genre.

Memories of childhood often come into our minds and bring us a warm feeling, like walking in the sugar cane field and searching for some canes left by the farmer. Some memory may embarass us. Retell this kind of experience or describe the feeling.

Write about an event as it happened to you; relate some occurrence that you took part in, either with or without your willing acceptance.

You may choose any event, but think for a minute: It ought to be something you care about, something that mattered at least when you first experienced it and hopefully still matters. Choose any event that you have a real emotional stake in. The first rule in writing is that if you don't care about your topic, chances are neither will the reader. The event you write about should be able to withstand the "so what?" test.

Write specifically. Remember the details that made the event real, including pertinent sensory date: how things looked and sounded and felt.

Above all, use your own voice. We've all read enough academic, assembly line, overblown, and sterile language to last a lifetime. We want to read your paper and hear you, the individual.

Someone has been snooping in your diary. Other than this discovery, your life has been pretty dull lately. You decide to spice up your next entry by describing yesterday in a manner that will give the snooper a good shock. You must, however, write it in a way that allows you to explain away every nuance.

If you could be reborn tomorrow as someone else, who would you be and why? How does this person compare to you? improve on you?

One day last term I rode a city bus into the business district. It was the first time in a while that I had ventured outside my immediate community. This bus ride reminded me of a number of things that I had forgotten. Mainly, it reminded me that the world isn't composed of only college students. The people on the bus looked different, and *were* different from most people who walk on the campus. This bus ride was an educational experience. I learned something (or, I was reminded of something I had forgotten).

Write about an educational experience. Perhaps--like this bus ride--the experience took you out of your regular environment. Perhaps this change of environment was one of the keys to the education. Perhaps not. Regardless, write about the experience itself (the people, the scenes, the events) and also, write about what you learned.

Look outside. Observe the weather. Pause for a moment and think about the weather, the day, and yourself. Write a description of the weather or day, or write about how the weather makes you feel. Feel free to use any kind of writing you wish--descriptive prose, poetry, or a story.

Think about the most embarassing thing that ever happened to you. Recall it in slow-motion (the way embarrassing moments always seem anyway). Now write a poem or story in which you try to convey your feelings and emotions as well as the events in your slow-motion replay.

Write a biographical sketch. Avoid the statistics of the obituary and choose instead an incident or moment of your subject's life. Focus on the details that make the person memorable and unique--the smells, the mannerisms, the objects your subject holds dear.

Show and Tell

Directions. Readers love to figure things out for themselves. They do this much more often when a writing makes them do it by giving hints rather than telling outright what is going on. Revise the following sentences so that they show what is going on rather than telling. Substitute words that are vivid and sensory for those that are plain and perhaps overused. Don't say it, *describe* it.

Example: I got angry.

Revised form: The blood pressure bulb inside my head shot upward and I began to see everything in shades of red through my bulging eyeballs!

1. The cat chased the rat down the stairs.
2. The wind blew quite hard, in fact, very very hard. (really!)
3. Last summer when I was in school I got my first real girlfriend.
4. The red car came speeding down the street.
5. I was so tired I couldn't go another step.
6. I read the poem.

Think of an issue or aggravation about which you feel strongly. (This could include an important political or moral issue; or it could be something trivial like irresponsible roommates who eat your yogurt or irritating backseat drivers.) Instead of trying to prove your point by writing from your *own* point-of-view, saterize your opposition by writing from his or her point of view. This fictional writer, or "persona," can be made to seem very unpleasant to the reader. You may use a story form, narrative, dialogue, stream-of-consciousness, letter, or editorial; but you must write from the point-of-view of your fictionalized opposition.

We all are blessed with "significant others" in our lives who touch us in many ways. Write a diary entry about one of those individuals in your own life. Use the entry as an opportunity to examine how and why that person is important to you. If you prefer, you may write a letter directly to the individual.

Name Game Assignment: Write your full name at the top of the page. Then choose one or any combination of the following suggestions to write about.

1. the origins of any or all of your name.
2. how you feel about your name.
3. specify a nickname if you have one and describe its origins and/or your feelings about it.
4. discuss names or nicknames in general.

Write something about yourself. Imagine yourself coming to class next time. We're all sitting around in our desks, arranged in a circle. And you're going to read your paper, which will introduce yourself to the rest of the class. In fact, a few students are going to read their papers, which will introduce themselves to the rest of the class. But you're one of them--one of those who will read your paper. What are you going to say?

Point of view is a very crucial element in our relationship with other people. The ability to see another's point of view greatly increases our chances of understanding why other people feel, act, and react the way they do. In paragraph form, explain a situation you've been in where you differed about something with another person. Explain your point of view; why you took the stand you did. Take a few minutes after that to "become" the other person. Write IN FIRST PERSON, from the others' point of view why they took the stand they did. After having done this, if you still hold to your original stand, you don't need to write anything down. If your stand has changed, explain how it has.

Writing is a non-aerobic contact sport. Work up a good sweat.

Bring someone you know to life on paper. It can be anyone you know well, but if possible make it someone not your own age. Otherwise the class will produce a glut of roommate or boy/girlfriend papers, which are generally less than effective because they so lack any real distance between writer and subject.

Remember above all that ACTION DEPICTS CHARACTER. That is, we readers come to a much better understanding of someone whose words and deeds the writer allows us to hear and see for ourselves than we do of a character who the writer insists on merely "telling about." If you get down on paper what your character does and says, such that the sensitive reader begins to intuit the significance of these actions and words, you'll have a good start toward a successful sketch.

Write a letter to someone or something that makes you feel very strongly. (You might feel the emotions, of love, hate, anger, or you might try to express thanks, condolences, congratulations--just to name a few of the many possibilities.) Here are some examples of addresses:

--Your mom or dad
--President
--Governor
--Your favorite teacher
--Your least favorite teacher
--Secretary of State
--Draft Dodgers
--The Better Business Bureau
--Ralph Nadar
--The Board of Trustees
--Your girl or boyfriend
--Your ex-girl or ex-boyfriend
--Your grandmother or grandfather

Write a first draft of a letter you have been wanting to write to a congressman, or the President, regarding a social concern you have.

Write the story of an experience you have had which touches one of the national controversies of the time. You don't have to name the controversy or make general statements about it. Just try to realize a piece of your life, or the life of someone you know, down on paper.

(from Ken Macrorie's Telling Writing.)

Name a setting or image: ____________________

Think of five unusual words--at least 2 of them verbs--that have a pleasing or quaint sound.

1. ____________________
2. ____________________
3. ____________________
4. ____________________
5. ____________________

Write a piece in which you incorporate your five words into a piece of writing. Keep your image in mind.

Comment upon an experience in which you were not at all pleased with the results. In addition to which, following careful rationalization you concluded that you were, indeed, responsible for the negative results.

Study a stranger (at a bar, in a grocery store, in your dorm, or in this class). Describe this stranger so that he or she will be recognizable to us. Now, develop a convincing life-story for your character, which might explain why this stranger appears or acts as he or she does. Make the person "live" for your reader.

Think of the person you most despise, and recall his or her worst character trait. You are interested in warning a group of friends about this person's offensive characteristic, but since you don't wish to seem petty, give a quick description of that awful trait's appearance or effect without naming the trait even once.

Is there a conflict between what a freshman expects from an English writing course, what an instructor expects, and what the general public expects? Write about any conflicts you see in this situation.

A local women's organization has invited you to participate in a symposium on "women's lib" which will be televised on your community's cable access channel. You have been encouraged to talk about specific ramifications of the issue (e.g.--"house husbands"), not simply to tell whether you favor or oppose it in general. Write a rough draft of what your opening statement to this group would be.

The office manager where you work has just been offered a cut-rate price on an ugly abstract print. It will be hung in a very conspicuous place and greet everyone coming into the main office. An animated discussion of the print takes place over lunch and you are nominated to write a memo to the office manager giving the group's opinions.

It is frequently preferable to look forward rather than backward. But, too, we can learn from past experiences, as most of us will agree. What specific incident, experience or action do you regret most about your past? If there is more than one thing that comes to mind choose the one which seems most applicable to the questions below. Was it a relationship you could have handled better? a job offer you didn't accept? or some other once-in-a-lifetime opportunity? In paragraph form respond to the questions below:

1. What incident, experience or action do you regret?
2. How would you advise someone today facing the same situation you did, knowing what you do now?
3. Have you learned anything from this past experience which has changed the way you live your life today?

What do you think about America's emphasis on youth? Do you see it as dangerous in any way? How do you see it?

How do you feel about the movement in higher education away from the humanities and liberal arts? Do you predict that the trend will continue, level off, or what? Why?

If money were not an issue, what would you major in and why?

How will being a college graduate make your life more difficult?

Despite all the cash you think you spend to attend college, most of your education is underwritten by federal and state money. In a sense, you are being invested in. What will the nation get in return for its investment?

Sketch a paragraph from the middle of a letter to your parents. In the paragraph describe your present acute impoverishment or desperate financial need as explicitly as you can. Your purpose is obvious, but since you wish to convince the folks that this time is somehow different from all the other times, avoid any specific mention of money or their generosity.

In Persig's book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, Persig examines the place of "quality" in the world. Everyone knows what "quality" is, but like other abstractions (love, beauty, friendship) the term has a bit different meaning for everyone because each person has his or her own concrete experiences by which to "define" quality. Instead of trying to "define" quality in abstract terms (like a dictionary definition), pick a concrete experience--something you've done, a place, a relationship, a person, an object, a pet--and write that experience in the most specific terms. Don't *analyze*, just use specifics which *show* the experiences. You may use a dialogue, a narrative, a letter to a friend, a description, or a stream-of-consciousness.

The Junior Achievement students have invented and begun to produce a new product called a "Doozle." WJIM has offered free air time for publicizing it and the students ask you to write the ad copy and/or jingle needed to advertise it.

This is an assignment. For the next 20 minutes you will conduct an interior monologue. The design of this assignment is to give you the chance to talk to yourself. Had this been an actual paper topic you would have been prepared differently. This is only an assignment.

Have you ever seen someone you admire or wish to be like or some group you feel angry with? Describe the character.

Paper Assignment: Write a character sketch of someone who had influenced your life, for good or bad. Choose someone you know fairly well and present the person through two or three incidents that reveal something essential about the person. Lead the reader to discover the person through your character's reactions to the situations you present. Use the introduction and conclusion to engage reader interest and to evoke a response to your character and not on your response to him/her; the writing should reveal your response through your treatment of the subject.

Assignment: Write a dialogue of letters, memos, or a short play between two (or more) sides of yourself, helping you clarify and work through a personal problem or question.

What is your earliest memory? Do you remember your age at the time? What was the setting of this memory? Who was present? Often a certain memory will stand out because the actual occurrence involved strong emotional feelings. What emotion(s) was (were) tied in with your first memory which caused you to remember it until this day? Add any other details which will help describe your first memory.

A HORROR TALE. Your family pet has been acting strange lately. You have always felt comfortable around it and have never been afraid of it. One night you notice that it has begun to get bigger. At first you thought your eyes were playing tricks on you, but soon it becomes so big that you cannot help but be frightened by its size and its strange nature. It begins to threaten your life, in subtle or overwhelming ways. Write about what is happening to you as if you were writing a diary.

Use the following sentence as either the opening or closing line in a narrative. "The storm struck at noon."

MONSTER TALES. Choose a part of your body and try to make it frightening, as though it in itself is a monster. Write a description of it that will frighten a reader. Make it sound ugly and disgusting.

Describe the teacher/professor who has had the greatest impact on your life. What was special about this teacher, why was he effective, what controlled her life or was most important to her, what was his body language like, did she have special mannerisms, what were his special gifts or abilities? Give details that reveal him or her in the depths, not superficial appearances.

Use a favorite epigraph (inscription, quote, or motto) as a springboard for a piece of writing. The epigraph can be anything from the refrain of a song or an advertising or political slogan, to a quote from Shakespeare or The Bible. It can be a quoted piece of parental advice, a passage from a poem or novel: an adage, or the graffiti scrawled in a john or under a bridge.

Free Writing Assignment: Write for twenty minutes, as quickly as you can. Your pen should never stop or leave the paper. If you cannot think of anything to say or cannot think of the right word, put down whatever comes to mind. Do not be concerned with grammar, mechanics, organization or even legibility--the idea of the exercise is to thwart the censor that automatically operates when you put pen to paper. It is a way to brainstorm for ideas, to discover what you might you might have to say about a given topic. After you have finished at the end of 20 minutes, read what you have written and make three comments about the writing.

What is the connection between reading and writing skills? Can one be an excellent reader and be a poor writer, or vice versa?

Describe your "ideal room"; what are the objects in the room, textures, colors, floor coverings, what do you do there, how do you feel there, what do you see from the windows? This is FANTASY, use your imagination, have fun.

Describe an encounter with a person you love, hate, despise, or fear. Use dialogue to make this personal exchange come alive.

What factors led you to choose your particular major? Include such considerations as: your own interests and talents, family pressures, income potential, in your field, marketability, etc. There is only one focus to concentrate on in this paper--yourself. That is, use your writing to share some part of yourself, some aspect of you as an individual. This may be a belief, experience, idea, etc. The main thing to keep in mind is that you are giving something that shows what you are like as a person.

Write two short dialogues that carry truth that counts for you and voices that you believe speak truly and individually.
(from Ken Macrorie's Telling Writing)

Recreate a dream in which you were brought to judgement, or recreate a time in your life in which you were brought to judgement, using a dream state (sleep, unconsciousness, daydreaming) as the narrative framework for the judgement.

If you knew nothing about the writing process, where would you begin when teaching a writing course?

Describe the event that occured today which most determined what your day has been like.

It is the year 2025. You have been asked by the city fathers of your community to contribute to an anthology they plan to publish locally called "Our Town--A Look at the Past." They are particularly interested in nostalgic articles and poems which evoke a sense of the people and place as they used to be.

The Matchmaker

The Matchmaker is a literary project in which the student matches two worthwhile books: one a classic, one a contemporary. Both books are to be within the same category or general theme. The student is to take note of similarities and differences in such areas as theme, plot, characterization, censorship, historical/social background involvement, author style, and mechanics such as type of print, cover, length, dedication, etc. The written report should be 300-500 words. Examples follow:

Category	Author	Title	Author	Title
mystery	Doyle	Tales of Sherlock Holmes	Christie	Elephants Can Remember
war	Dickens	Tales of Two Cities	Jakes	The Seekers
love	Austen	Emma	Breck	Maggie
animals	Steinbeck	The Red Pony	Kjelgaard	Big Red
sci/fi	Wells	War of the Worlds	Lucas	Star Wars

The Michigan Council of Teachers of English Executive Board, 1982-1983:

Sheila Fitzgerald, President
Ronald Kar, President-Elect
Gail Scharf, Vice President
Robert Root, Past President
Ray H. Lawson, Secretary/Treasurer
Richard Koch, College Chair
Joanne L. Van Syckle, Elementary Chair
Herbert W. Brenner, Secondary Chair
Scott McNabb, Publications Chair
John D. Beard, M.E.T. Editor

Writing Teachers: What We Say About What We Do was typed by Chris Zeeff. Thanks Chris.

Cover and typography by Scott McNabb